DITTE: Towards the Stars

Martin Andersen Nexö

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by Martin Andersen Nexö

HOW FEW are the really first-rate novels interpreting a working woman's life!

There is, of course, Martin Anderson Nexö's classic "Ditte," and there is—well, there is "Ditte." A long rich work in three volumes, full of the kind of poetic detail found only in books like Gorki's and O'Casey's autobiographies, it has been generally unobtainable in this country for a long time now. The few scarce copies around have been borrowed and reborrowed and read to dog-eared tatters, or else hoarded by their owners. To coin an understatement, Liberty Book Club is performing an immense service in bringing out this new low-priced edition.

Ditte is the daughter of "the family of Man." As Nexö describes it, the branch that Ditte belonged to "had in a marked degree the typical characteristics of the family: two eyes—and a nose in the middle of their faces; one mouth which could both kiss and bite, and a pair of fists which they could make good use of. In addition to this the family was alike in that most of its members were better than their circumstances. One could recognize the Man family anywhere by their bad qualities being traceable to definite causes, while for the good in them there was no explanation at all: it was inbred . . . They were contented and hardy, and had the Man's insatiable desire to overcome difficulties; for them there was no bitterness in work, and before long the result of their labors could be seen.

(Continued on back flap)

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DITTE
TOWARDS THE STARS

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TOWARDS THE STARS

BY
MARTIN ANDERSEN NEXÖ

Translated by
ASTA AND ROWLAND KENNEY

You that bared your glowing heart
To the cold blast of the wind,
Do you hope beyond the grave?

NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

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by
Henry Holt and Company

Printed in U. S. A.

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CHAPTER I.

GOD'S LITTLE CREATURES.

WINTER is an evil time for all little creatures; but for the poor man it is like a hell which must be suffered twice—in anticipation first, then he must go through it. When the light nights depart, when the lamp is needed to light people to bed, ghosts creep into the minds. Oil must be bought, and soon also wood and coke; the darker and colder it becomes—the more one needs of everything. The dark and the cold—these are the evil team of winter. And in the car sits King Satan himself, topping an uncanny load of need, sorrow and misery. Straight from hell he comes—and he is the only carrier who is at all prepared to carry for the poor. They didn't exactly send for him—if only he would overturn on the way, for instance where the rich live! It would be great fun to see how they would receive him and his trappings. But Satan is a good cabman. He doesn't go to the front door with the dustbin and to the back door with the wedding cake.

God's little creatures take everything in their own care-free way; they crouch down during the show-

ers and chirp again with the faintest gleam of sun; they let heaven run the whole show. But the poor man has an unholy tendency to think, the result of the Lord God's mistake when He made him a man but classed him with the animals. He cannot cease remembering and thinking ahead; before he has yet recovered from the slashes of last winter's whip he hears the lash in the air again. What will the winter be like—terribly severe? Ah well, better so and an end to the suffering; cruel masters seldom rule long. Or will it be slow torture? That is the worst of all!

He sees omens everywhere—in the harvest, in the behavior of the field-mice, in the quick or slow fall of the leaves, and in how far the new bread goes. Yes, and in the price of fuel. If the coals are dear the winter is sure to be severe. That is a manifestation—one of many—of the devil's riotous humor. The poor man knows him only too well from that side.

Lord God had provided plenty of rowan-berries and haws to satisfy the birds out there in the country, and in here the rats had been uncommonly impudent; they hoarded great stores. Thus everything pointed to a severe winter. True enough, the sparrows mated in the roof-gutters far into the autumn, as if they counted on eternal summer; but it was no good looking for signs to those vagabonds. They were interested only in warm horse-droppings —and *those* fall all the year round.

It *was* a severe winter. It set in early with hard frost and much snow and closed the door upon all work. A winter like those Ditte remembered from her childhood at home at Sands Farm when the cold went right through everything and stood with bared fangs two steps from the roaring stove. Whatever could be raked and scraped together went into that insatiable iron monster, and yet one was no nearer. A sooty sneeze, a spit or two from the coffeepot which always stood on the stove—and goodbye to that shovelful of coals, and to the next as well. The coalman was doing well now—he surely had got the devil for his uncle. He was putting money aside; there could be no mistaking that, for his measures grew smaller and smaller. All the rest of the hucksters in the quarter complained pitifully.

The little birds froze and came begging to the window; they even tapped at the pane. One could not see them, for the panes were always frozen right to the top; but Ditte knew it was they. She used the zinc outside the attic window as a feeding trough; there she put the leavings after warming them. Nearby there was always some bird or other on the lookout; as soon as she touched the window it gave the others a signal and in a moment there was a whole flock. The children were much interested, and Ditte had to tell the names of the various birds; she recognized them from the country.

"And do they also know you?" asked Peter.

It almost appeared so; at any rate they were not the least bit afraid. Besides the ordinary sparrows there were yellowhammers, finches, blackbirds and a wren—wherever they came from; she had never seen them in here before. It was the cold that drove them together and in towards men's houses. Strange this trust and confidence among the needy. The wild animals at home, which were otherwise so timid, came right up to the Crow's Nest in severe winters and begged scraps at the kitchen door—fox and hare side by side. Ditte must tell about that; and the Crow's Nest—the rag and bone man's ignominious abode which everybody shunned—became a veritable fairy castle where they had potatoes in a pit, enough for the whole winter, and herrings in a big barrel, and smoked bacon hanging round the fireplace. It sounded almost incredible, to Ditte herself no less than to the children; and Old Rasmussen clapped her bony hands together. "Gracious me, child, it must have been a real manor-house," she said. "And with a horse—with a horse, too! Not even the bakers' have got that."

Even the rats held together. One morning there was a wide path trodden across the snow of the back yard; they had left the tenements one and all to try other quarters.

Ah yes, if one could only seek other quarters! But there was nothing for it but to shrink into oneself. Old Rasmussen shrank until she turned quite

crooked and small, and even Ditte cowered under the cold.

The last few months had been difficult for her to get through. Georg's accident had shocked her very much and she had not got over it yet. Her abdomen and her legs were affected, and she suffered from hemorrhages in spite of her pregnancy. The terrible cold did not make things better; it shut the door everywhere—work was hardly to be had. She had not much strength, so from that point of view it was just as well; but soul and body had to be kept together. Her house-mates were splendid. Most of them were as badly off as she herself, but if they had anything they came along with a bite for her and for the children too.

And Karl was splendid—very grudgingly she had to admit that.

Somehow or other he had got to know of her sad plight; and one day, shortly after the accident, he stood in her room—he also ravaged by unemployment. Ditte screamed when she saw him; they had not spoken to each other since she came to the capital. He returned whenever he had earned a bit of money and shared it with them; he did not plume himself on anything. She grew accustomed to him, but did not understand how he managed to make ends meet. He never complained.

One day he arrived with empty hands, starved and frozen. "I'm sorry I've nothing for you," he said to the little ones who planted themselves close

round him. They were pale and their faces were covered with scrofulous sores.

"Where is your overcoat?" Ditte asked. "You are too cold in those thin clothes."

Karl smiled. "I shall bite the head off my pride and go home now," he said. "I can't go on any longer." For the last week he had had no lodgings. He had eaten at the Samaritans* when they were open—every second day—and slept in barns and sheds. "But it won't do in the long run; the police will be after me," he said quietly.

Ditte listened to him with wide eyes which slowly filled with tears. "And I can't even help you," she said. "I've got nothing to eat! But a warm bed I can offer you." She looked hesitatingly from him to the bed.

"Oh yes," he broke out imploringly, "may I? Just for an hour? I haven't been in a warm bed for a long time."

Weary and exhausted as he was he immediately fell asleep. The little ones moved about quietly, but it was really quite unnecessary, for he slept like a log. He had hung jacket and waistcoat across the foot of the bed; Ditte looked over the lining and buttons. He mended his clothes himself, she noticed—the stitches were awkward; but it was neatly done for all that. Karl was never slipshod in what he did!

But the clothes were worn thin—dreadfully thin.

*Public Soup-kitchens.

Shivers raced up and down Ditte's back when she thought of him living in the open, night and day, in those clothes. She took an old muffler and tacked it doubled to the back of the waistcoat. Peter had it round his throat for his cough and ear-ache, but she gave him an old stocking instead.

Towards evening Karl awoke, rested and happier than she had ever before seen him. "Now I shall tramp home to Hill Farm," he said. "I'll beg my way and sleep in the barns—that will do nicely. And as soon as I come home I'll send you something to eat, little ones—real food, meat!"

Ditte had been downstairs and begged a loaf; she gave it to him. "Eat that on the way," she said; she feared he would want to share it with the children. "Thank you!" he said and tucked it under his coat.

But they found it in the kitchen after he had gone.

About ten days later a parcel of food really did arrive. There was also a letter enclosed. Quite contrary to his expectations he found that he was welcome; and Ditte understood from his letter that he was quite pleased to be back in the home where he had not set his foot for seven years. His mother was prostrate as a result of Johannes' brutal ill-treatment, so the other two brothers had been down and turned him out. The farm wanted a man to manage it, so Karl would stay at home and look after it—for the time being, at any rate. They were also in need of a young and capable house-

wife, he wrote—the place was in a worse state of decay than ever. But the mother was kind and reasonable, entirely changed.

Ditte took out the letter many a time and read it over and over again—she could not quite make it out. A strange message to bring in the midst of all this misery. Was it redress at last—the fulfilment of dreams withered long ago? She knew that Karen Bakkegaard and Uncle Johannes lived together like cat and dog—they had taken too much in advance! Already before the marriage they behaved like wedded people who have been through the best part of their union; and the three days wedding-feast ended in their fighting each other. Subsequently it had been a continuous pulling each other's hair and reconciliation. They had their honeymoon once a month, said Lars Peter, who frequently came down on business.

Although the Hill Farm woman had been head over ears in love with the swarthy jackanapes, she had been careful enough not to give him the right over her property. Thus he had not succeeded in gambling everything away; but there was eternal war between them. And now he was turned out, and the sons once more returned to their home; Karl could take over the farm if he chose, and she herself——.

Ditte saw new possibilities opening out before her, but she did not rejoice; either she no longer believed in them, or they no longer interested her. It was

as if it concerned some other person, some stranger. "Then we could get Jens home to the farm," the letter said. Jens—how she had cried her pillow wet many a night, longing for her child. But even those sources were dried up; her sorrow and want now welled forth from other ground. And the longing —well, did she still long for anything? At any rate her wishes did not carry her outside her little world; and the longing generally clung to the warm, dark corner of the room under the slanting roof. There she wanted a wickerwork chair with a cushion so that she might now and then rest her swollen legs and shut her eyes and be free of all care.

Ditte was ill and tired; she could manage to keep going, but she could not break new ground. She struggled on day after day, longing for the end of the winter and anxious to get through with her confinement—surely fresh courage and strength would come to her then.

In March the weather broke at last. The frost turned to mild rain, the snow disappeared in the course of a few days, everything looked newly laundered in the sunshine. "If only it would last," Ditte sighed.

"It's sure to last," Old Rasmussen replied. "The sparrows have already gone off into the country again, and last night the rats returned and moved into the old flats; one can hear them piping around the loft all night long."

"There's one!" Peter shouted from the open

window where he was sunning himself. Sure enough, a big old chap walked right round the roof-gutter, carefully observant. He reminded one of an old gentleman who has at last got the door to the balcony open after a hard winter—he was quite pathetic to watch.

There was nothing amiss with the spring itself; but work somehow kept lagging, whatever the reason might be. Formerly it was always the weather that decided. "One can get at the soil again now the frost has left the ground," they said to each other; it was obvious that there would be work now—first of all, agricultural work, and that carried the rest with it. But this time the frost held in quite another place and closed everything down with its tough, impenetrable crust. It was as if the devil himself had conspired with those who provided work and had himself closed his fist round the bread-bag of the poor—things did not ease. *Did* the devil have his fingers in the pie? Must the workers be humbled and humiliated still further? There was whispering from man to man; a rumour said it was the Unions they wanted to get at.

However that might be, work was not to be had. The workers came out of their compulsory winter hibernation and from morn to night hovered in flocks round the places where there was anything to be done; they stood shuffling along the docks and outside the factory gates with doglike and fatalistic expressions. But the bosses were neither to be

seen nor heard. The ships did not rig out and put to sea as was their wont in the spring; most of them remained in harbor. Even the Municipal Authorities seemed to have caught the general drowsiness and did nothing real. It brought to mind the old saying that when one cow starts running the whole herd will stampede; one thing kept another down.

The bricklayers were idle, although many people wanted to build. It was said that the banks refused building loans so that a house famine might be created—they wanted to raise the rents. They owned huge building sites on which they intended to make a nice profit.

With regard to road men and concrete-workers there was nothing but sheer misery. The cod is said to grow flabby in the flesh when there is an "r" in the month; the road- and sewage-works had it the other way about, so the men there had been out of work since the autumn. They carried on by starving and pawning whatever was left; those who were able to do so had disappeared from the capital —gone to some provincial town or into the country where existence was not so iron-hard.

Was the whole thing due to the machines? They became more and more perfect and self-sufficing. Maybe a point would soon be reached when the poor man was of no earthly use. Then he would have to lie down and die of starvation! Yes, or take the lead himself as some of the hot-heads proposed!

CHAPTER II.

MOTHER DITTE.

GRANNY was right after all when she prophesied that a fair word would make Ditte with child. "Your heart beats right outside your dress, child—and then the brown stripe down your stomach!" she had said. "That silly heart—mind it doesn't lead you into too much misfortune!"

Yes, that silly heart! She had scarcely got out of childhood before it led her out into sin and sorrow; and still she was no wiser. She could not see a little one without wishing it between her hands; a child's weeping was enough to make her heart pregnant with the tenderest mother-feelings. Mother Ditte she was called in the buildings, young though she was; the children gave her that name, and from them it went over to the grown ups. The other women came as a matter of course and put their little ones in to her when they wanted to slip out for a moment; and it was a matter of course that the little ones went to her when there was something amiss. With her rough hands and voice she dried many a tear and stilled many a childish sor-

row; soft she was not, but she helped! The children unconsciously attached most importance to this —Mother Ditte was still "the one who must."

Teeming she was—that could not be denied. Whatever she did she seemed to end up with a new mouth to feed, a new being to look after. She had taken Peter in to nurse so that Georg might have something to entertain him whilst he lay ill. His mother had been deserted by the father, and Ditte was to have ten kroner a month for him. But before Christmas the mother had vanished; no more money was paid for him. But Ditte was happy to be allowed to keep the boy.

Near Christmas-time a young woman died and left a three years old girl. They lived in a room a few doors from Ditte, further in on the long corridor of the attics; Ditte naturally took over the child when the father went to work. He was a laborer. Then unemployment came and chased him out, and he took to the road; and Ditte took over the little girl altogether. Now he was here, now there, working or mooching his way along the roads and sending money whenever he could. He was honest enough. But for Ditte it was an uncertain income and an inconvenient way of getting it —kroner and half-krone bits put into letters to the little girl. One ran the risk of the Postal authorities discovering it some day and confiscating the money, and it was never a sum big enough to pay the rent.

Peter and little Anna—that was already two; when her own baby was brought into the world there would be a whole nestfull! Then there was the old widow Rasmussen with whom she shared her mean bread and her fire too, and the lodger who had the best room and wanted coffee every morning. He wore leather boots and a soft rubber collar and spectacles—he had surely been high up in the world! But would she ever see anything of the rent? Ditte could manage! She would soon have a whole menagerie! Altogether it was a nice state of affairs, the one in Prince's Street; it would look well when she arrived on the Sunday afternoon at Isted Street with the whole crowd.

Well, Ditte did not worry them overmuch at home, that was sure. She had been there to lend a hand when Sine had her baby. Sine had then given her to understand that they did not approve of her ways—she might at any rate have seen to it that she was properly married to Georg! Since then Ditte only went home when she was specially asked. But Lars Peter looked in frequently and left a couple of kroner with her; Sine must not know about his visits, she gathered. He never stayed long, and there was something reserved about him; he was no longer as of old.

This was due to Sine—Ditte knew that. She had high notions and wanted to rise in the world, so of course it was not nice to have a step-daughter about whom one thing and another might be said. Else

was in business and sat thumping a typewriter; she wore a costume when she went to work and walked out with a junior clerk in the Postal Service who even visited her home—nothing like swagger! She never had time to look in at Ditte's. But Povl often slipped in when he was running errands for his master. He was errand boy for a cycle maker and was to be properly apprenticed to him as soon as he was confirmed. He was always on the run and rattled about on his rusty old bike like a madman. It was quite dangerous to meet him at a corner; he incessantly chimed his way through like the fire engine —everything must get out of his way. Now he could pick to pieces and put together to his heart's content. He always brought some funny toy or other for the kids—old bits of bicycles which he had put together in the most ingenious way. When the weather shaped, Peter would come down and sit across the bar; and he shot away with the kid in front while Ditte stood with her heart in her throat. Before she had time to look round he came chiming from the other side, having rounded the whole quarter.

"But the police, boy!" said Ditte.

"Pooh, I just run away from them—before they can clap eyes on me I'm gone." He was anything but timid; one would think he had lived all his childhood here on the pavements.

Rasmus—the twin—also came; he and Povl still looked upon Ditte as their real mother. She mended

their clothes when they had torn them and so saved them from trouble at home; and they gave her of their little pocket money. Rasmus was no longer with Lars Peter; he lived in Dannebrog Street with some people who had a greengrocer's shop and used him for an errand boy. He was quite happy.

Nevertheless Ditte thought it funny that he should live among strangers. She couldn't understand how Lars Peter could let him go; he who had himself gathered him up from Old Dorium's corpse. She could still remember how he came carrying the baby—a deserted fledgling—in his strong protecting arms. Sine had probably arranged this as well, she managed everything according to her own ideas! But they got on well together.

Lars Peter probably didn't share Sine's narrow view of existence—if he did he must indeed have altered. But he was head over ears in love with his red-cheeked, buxom wife—and had a towering respect for her. Such a wife he had never had before, always so gentle and at the same time so sure and matter of fact. When she had an opinion it must be right, even if one felt it as contrary to one's own rules of life. She'd given them a new start in life. And what a kid she'd given him! He had fought his rounds with life, had started from the beginning again—and landed in the ashes every time like that man Job. He didn't mind a spell of fair weather. And Sine helped him to it—she brought luck; to give in to her was like giving in

to luck itself. For instance, the home they had built: a three-roomed flat with a red plush suite in the parlor, and in the dining-room an oak sideboard with copperware. They got it all cheap from their shop of course; but by himself he would never have got the idea. Her brains were required for that!

Occasionally he looked as if bored at home; perhaps it was chiefly on such occasions he sought Ditte. Then he would generally talk about the Crow's Nest and the Hamlet; he longed for the country, most perhaps for the roads.

But the winter which was so hard for most other people was a help to him. About New Year the business was extended to second-hand furniture, boots and clothes, and in the cellars the goods piled up into heaps. There was plenty to get hold of, want forced people to sell. But there was not much sale; those who needed Lars Peter's second-hand clobber had nothing to buy with. Gradually all his cellars were filled, and a shed in the garden as well. Even in the flat one could hardly move for furniture and things; the goods were piled on top of each other right up to the ceiling, and they sent out a bad smell. It lay like a heavy pressure on the chest; all Sine's savings had gradually gone into the purchases. Some fine day they would go bust, maybe—the rent they had to pay!

Then Lars Peter had a bright idea—at a period when it was not so difficult to get Sine's consent. He hired a horse and car and took to the roads

again. They could easily dispense with him as far as the business at home was concerned; Sine was much smarter there. To tell the truth he was rather too soft with them when they came with their sticks. But this was his right element! The peasants liked to buy second-hand—perhaps because they straightway concluded that they bought cheap; and Lars Peter had no tender feelings for their purses. If he made a good bargain no lukewarm water gathered round his heart on that score.

That gave another push, the accumulated stores shrunk and money went into the coffer. It certainly wasn't genteel; it had better not get about in the quarter that Furniture Dealer Lars Peter Hansen went on the roads chaffering. Povl was ordered by the mother not to tell anybody. But Ditte loved the father better for it. When he visited her now he smelled of horse as in former days; the smell of the roads once more clung to his hair and voice.

The poor man has many loopholes, says a Copenhagen proverb. If he is out of work he has merely to go to the poor-house; and if they won't have him there either—well, he has learnt how to starve. It is a good thing to know many trades.

Ditte was born with the consciousness of these many loopholes; to tell the truth it never gave her any peace. It was not easy for her to put the blame on others, so she put it on herself. It was her fault if the children and Old Rasmussen froze and didn't

get the food they needed; not the fault of those who put their burdens on her, not the fault of a society which left a highly pregnant woman to shoulder her lot alone. As the frost no longer closed all avenues there was no excuse. The loopholes were there, it was merely a matter of finding them.

She did find them, at any rate sufficient to keep the worst wolf from the door; but it was only by a superhuman exertion of will and endurance. First there was a newspaper woman who wanted someone to relieve her of the worst of the stairs. Ditte applied, and for a week she turned up every morning at five o'clock at a corner and took over deliveries to all third and fourth stories. Then she could stand it no longer; but in the meantime something else cropped up—always of a similar nature. Regular work was not to be had at all; those who were fortunate enough to have obtained it did not give it up in times like these. But with luck one might get a couple of days' charring; and one could always pick coke at the wharves. If one worked hard one might get a krone out of that—besides the coke required for one's own stove.

The most difficult thing to find was the rent: All through the winter Ditte's dread had been that first day of the month when she must find 15 kroner, and never knew where to lay her hands on them. But that question was settled now—one morning the old stairwoman of the buildings was found dead in her bed. The agent offered Ditte the job; the pay

being rent-free rooms. It was a heavy and thankless job, one difficult to find anybody to take on; much despised it was too. But Ditte accepted it as a help from heaven.

So now she had sunk so much deeper—stair-woman! Now she might be quite sure she wouldn't be invited to Povl's confirmation. She was sorry for that; she had been to none too many parties in her life, and they were having a big to-do. But the rent was settled; it was no longer necessary to use every farthing of Widow Rasmussen's mean grant. The old woman would be able to get a summer garment—she needed it.

It was easy to settle Ditte's estate now, anybody could do that. She had omitted to get properly married to Georg while there was yet time—that couldn't be remedied now. But she could have wound up after his death, got rid of the foster child instead of taking on yet another, and tried to get out of that awful quarter. She couldn't go into service in her present condition, but she might have accepted Karl—all the more as he had offered to father the child she was with. Few girls could boast of such a cover-man—in her condition. He would be a good husband to her, and they had long enough circled round each other like the cat round the hot porridge. There couldn't be much to consider in their case—they *had* singed their whiskers, both of them.

She managed her affairs badly, even Lars Peter

could see that. There was no push in her, no ambition either; but she was kind. She saddled herself with too much! There was such a thing as being too kind; there was no harm in looking to one's own advantage occasionally. But mentioning that to her was like pouring water on a duck's back! She persisted.

Poor Mother Ditte, what else could she do—she was just as innocent of all this as the rest of them. It was in her hands, in her legs, in her mind; she *must* help the kid that yelled, she *must* run round to see how the woman, who was ill in block B, was getting on—she might be wanting a little help! She *must* think of them all, and preferably for them all too. Especially her hands had caught it; she couldn't get near a child or a patient without wanting to shake up the pillow—and then the rest followed quite naturally. That was her divine distinction, the constant shouldering of responsibility, this lending a hand, and being the provider. "A little Lord God," the old man of Gingerbread House had called her when she was at home looking after her little sisters and brothers. And Ditte hadn't grown meaner as time went on. She had gradually learnt to defend herself fairly well from those who wanted to exploit her; but she was a defenceless prey to the weak and helpless. "Look here, when you go to heaven the first thing you'll do is to make sure that the baby angels have got dry napkins on," the lodger sneered one day. But what was the good of

it? One might just as well forbid the sun to shine or the hen to scratch as forbid Ditte to lend a hand.

She was nearing the end of her pregnancy and moved about heavily; she was anything but well. Often she felt so worn out in the morning that she wished she could remain in bed. "You certainly ought to stay there then," said Old Rasmussen—"you need it badly. We'll find the food somehow, I'll soon be eighty years old, but I never yet died of hunger."

But Ditte got up after all to earn a little—wherever she found the strength to do it. Belike it came from some hidden source, for she hadn't much bodily strength—as far as one could see. Ditte wouldn't dream of giving in until she fell!

No, she didn't ask for quarter—that wasn't her way. The thought of surrender did not exist for her. But she might be somewhat harsh as a provider; it cost too much to keep her little world—there was nothing left for a surplus for the mind. Ditte provided, but not with a smile! Irreproachably she looked after her own, but the hand that gave was not always soft and warm. She was sorry to find it so; but it was not in her power to alter it.

But the children knew how to find the good meaning—the strangers as well as her own. Right from the other end of the long corridor they came toddling when something was amiss. Mother Ditte *must!*

CHAPTER III.

LITTLE GEORG.

ONE night in the beginning of May Ditte woke up with a scream. She had dreamed that she was being drawn and quartered across a plank—as a punishment because she was going to have a baby.

Pains shot across her loins and abdomen, and she got up to call Old Rasmussen and ask her to take the children into her room. But she had to lie down again, her legs were much swollen and would not carry her.

The children slept soundly, little Anna by her side against the wall, Peter at the foot of the bed with his feet towards little Anna. She lay listening to their breathing and wondered what to do; they couldn't stay here. Those silly legs! That was a reminder from the time she was a servant; as soon as ever there was something up with her they swelled. She listened for the sounds of night so that she might guess the time; the alarm clock had gone to the pawnbroker long ago and the ticket was sold. How long would the labor torment her be-

fore she was delivered, and would she get the cramp in her calves this time?—that was almost more painful than the rest. Perhaps she would die during the confinement; but that didn't matter. She merely wished that someone would sit and hold her hand, but didn't know who. Karl, yes—but he probably didn't care for her any longer—and small wonder, the way she behaved towards him. But it was a good thing she hadn't agreed to his fantasies about getting married and settling on the farm. The mother hadn't been able to live without Johannes after all and had recalled him; and then Karl had left home. She knew he was in town, but hadn't seen him. Perhaps he felt ashamed. Was there really anybody that cared for her? Many would miss her, but when she looked round for someone that loved her there was a strange emptiness. If only the sun would shine when she was to die; it was easier to get through everything then!

She made an effort to keep quiet during the labor and looked towards the blinds for dawn; she longed for the light. At four o'clock the cabman went down to feed the horses in the next building—she would call him.

Heavy steps sounded on the stairs, it was the lodger returning. She heard him trip and collide and speak to himself—he was squiffy! Then she needn't be afraid of calling him; when he was sober one dared not go near him. "Hr. Kramer!" she called when he had reached his room, quietly so as

not to wake the other inhabitants along the passage —"Hr. Kramer!"

He knocked and appeared in the doorway, stood swaying with the lamp in his hand; several times it was on the point of setting fire to his long, drooping moustache. "Excuse my calling on foot," he drawled, peering groggily into the room. "Did you want anything?"

"Oh I do feel bad, Hr. Kramer," Ditte complained. "Would you be very kind and give me a hand with the children?"

The Congratulator stared unsteadily into the room. "H-yes—h-yes! I mean——. You'd have done better to send for my father, his specialty was midwifery; but it ought to have been done some twenty years ago. May I ask, do you expect several?"

"Oh Hr. Kramer—I am really bad." Ditte turned over and cried with her forehead against the wall.

The lodger stood as if fallen from the clouds. "There, there—whatever is the matter?" he murmured. Then he pulled himself mightily together, steadied his power of vision by wrinkling the skin of his forehead once or twice and crossed the floor with a sure aim. "Excuse my calling on foot; but you did say *children,* little Fru Hansen," he said and bent over her.

"Yes, but I meant these children—if you would be kind enough to take them across to Old Rasmus-

sen." She dared not turn round—his breath stank of alcohol.

"Of course I will—I mean, of course I won't! Do you think I would disturb the poor old soul in the middle of the night?"

"I would like her to come and stay with me."

"That won't come off, do you see, for now I am sober." He made a large gesture with his hand. "Kramer takes the reins, madam, he carries the innocent little ones into his own bed and makes all arrangements—all arrangements! And you shut your beak and don't utter a chirp—see! Just think of nothing and everything will come right—women get through their jobs best when they don't think—. Oh yes, I knew a lady who gave birth to her boy with the legs first. She was a doctor of mathematics—she meditated on things too much, do you see." He tottered to and fro between the rooms whilst he chattered, carried a chair into his own room and brought it back again; twice he did that. "There you see," he said, pleased with himself, "one should always try first with a thing that won't break." Then he picked up Sister and tottered off with her whilst Ditte lay with open mouth, ready to scream. She did not trust him—in spite of the trial. But all went well; the children hung like dead across his arms and had no idea that they were being moved. "There now! Littlings . . . Littlings!" he said as he covered them up; it sounded quite touching. When

he was sober he didn't care much for them but snarled if they crossed his path.

"You didn't scream, did you? The occasion did not arise?" He appeared in the doorway laughing teasingly. "Oh yes, I observed you squinting at my legs—if they were wobbly. Women always look at the legs—but it's the head that matters. It's like the boys when they want to get through the fence, shall we say, after apples. They try the head first—if that goes through the body will follow. The head first, then!" He raised his forefinger admonishing. He giggled suddenly: "As it happens most people haven't got a head—that is why they get so easily through everything."

He stood huddled against the door-post, slipping farther and farther down. Suddenly he pulled himself violently together.

"Well, here I stay, watching and praying! Finished!" he said sitting down at the foot of Ditte's bed, shoulders against the wall. "And Mother Ditte must snuggle down for forty winks and gain strength for the big battle. You go to sleep—there's nothing to fear. Every minute a babe is born—maybe every second—so there you are. 'I'm ill,' you said just now; but do you call this an illness? If so I'm ill too when I've got a bit on. I say, do you ever get any rent from that sot the Congratulator?" He dug up a few coins from his waistcoat pocket and put them on the bedside table. "Well I'm damned—is that all that's left? It's been a

good day; but I'm a swine—do you see. Kramer's a swine, although he wears spectacles; you go and ask the females—beg your pardon—the ladies of this den. But it's been a good day; one of these Idiot-Jubilees—paraded at the top of the ladder for twenty-five years—oily hair parted down the back—Grand Cross or some such rubbish in recognition! Then of course I come with my bouquet, do you see: 'Excuse my calling on foot, your Excellency—but on this great occasion!' 'My dear sir—that you should come at all!' says the prey and slips ten kroner into my hand. Not badly said of a Top-Idiot, was it? For you'll admit it sounded like sarcasm!"

Ditte groaned with pain.

"There, there! Yes, it is bad. But it has to be bad before it can be better. I say, it's a good thing somebody is fond of kids—and gets them! For supposing a man——. That would have to be the head, I suppose, for that's the only part of a man that can produce anything. Suppose one's skull suddenly split open and a small man-child crawled out! Well, I'm only saying suppose—you needn't grin. Oh no, there's no danger. I remember my wife once cried out 'I am dying, I am dying!' Nonsense, I said, you are only having a baby. But then you should have heard her! Women can't bear a logical mind—whatever the reason may be. But you shut your eyes now!"

It was easy for him to say; but there was no end to his brandy-gabble!

At last he managed to chatter himself to sleep; he hung against the foot of Ditte's bed with his head on his arms. His breath filled the small room with fumes; Ditte's head felt quite heavy. The cabman had gone to work long ago; daylight filtered through the blind. And now she heard Old Rasmussen shuffle about in her rag slippers; she was warming a drop of coffee for herself in the kitchen. It must be five o'clock then!

Old Rasmussen carried the children across the loft and put them into her own bed; and with much trouble they shook life into the Congratulator and persuaded him to go to bed. He used dreadful language, sleep had made him vicious.

"Pooh!" Old Rasmussen screwed up her face when they were rid of him. "He's a proper beast, a real bad 'un."

"He's been ever so kind," said Ditte. "He wanted to stay here himself so you shouldn't be disturbed, mother."

"Good gracious—fancy being nursed by such a thing; not me, thank you kindly. You'd run the risk of God-knows-what."

Ditte laughed. "Oh I do feel so bad!" she broke off suddenly and moaned in pain. "I think I'm going to die! I feel so funny—as if everything in me was breaking up and going each its own way. And I can't understand it—it's six weeks early."

But it was right after all; Old Rasmussen had been through the pain herself a few times and knew

the symptoms quite well. She tidied up the room after the night and made up the fire so it should be warm when the baby arrived. Then she looked round for something to put under Ditte. It was not easy to find, the winter had swallowed all they could dispense with. Baby's clothes they had to beg from the other families, one piece here and one piece there. Then the midwife must be warned, and they must buy fresh coffee and fancy bread—ladies of that sort were always difficult in the way of coffee. Old Rasmussen had enough to do, more than was good for her poor legs. Fortunately she didn't feel them today. The occasion had roused her blood, she was quite capable and proud. It was a stroke of luck that that beast Kramer hadn't tippled away every farthing last night!

In the afternoon Ditte gave birth to a boy; he was premature and weighed only five pounds. But it was a boy nevertheless—despite the old woman's many omens that it would be a girl. "We'd better look again," said the old one—"we shall find we were mistaken." She felt quite annoyed that the baby should have deceived her. "It must be the weeny size of it that misled me," she said, disappointed.

The midwife, of course, only came when it was all over. She stood for a moment sporting her new coat, examined the baby's navel to see whether it was thoroughly tied up, and then whisked off again. She wouldn't have any coffee—it probably didn't

smell strong enough for her. "We'll drink our coffee ourselves," old Rasmussen said. "That stuck-up bag of conceit—she can go to blazes! I've received a many kids in my time."

So they drank coffee. Ditte had a specially strong cup—"that'll stir the blood!" said Old Rasmussen. And the children were allowed to come in and look at the new brother. They had been playing on the loft. They were not much interested in him. With each their slice of bread—they trotted off again—they'd had enough of sitting quiet in the room.

Old Rasmussen sat by the stove with the little naked bluish-red being in her lap; she rubbed dripping into the folds of the skin, and put cottonwool inside the binder so that it might keep its bit of warmth. There wasn't much blood in him; he would have to have a hot water bottle in the drawer of the chest that was to serve him for a bed. But it was a boy, at any rate. "He'll be doing his bit of mischief, you bet—small tho' he be," she said and fingered him. "God only knows why the Lord didn't take that bit of an appendix and shove it in instead of letting it hang there as a source of mischief and sorrow."

Ditte herself would rather have had a girl this time.

But the old woman couldn't understand that. "So you are satisfied with your lot then!" she concluded and crossed herself. "In itself it shouldn't have mattered one way or the other, for what one has

got the other can't do without—and the other way about. But for all that the Lord made the silly arrangement in such a way that it's us poor women that get hold of the glowing end of the icicle; if anything happens we get the burns. And we can't run away from it either—all we can do is to blubber and take the consequences. Be sure one wouldn't have taken to petticoat—if one'd had the choice. There a poor lass goes pluming herself—and has to run according to her fate and carry it home in her lap. And what becomes of the man in most cases? Women are just like the narrow lanes where the snow drifts together in heaps, and where did it come from? But the Lord probably had his own thoughts when he made us so foolishly soft; if we thought a little more of the consequences he might have some trouble in keeping his world populated."

"But weren't you properly married, mother?" asked Ditte in surprise.

"Of course I was married—but what's the good of that when I didn't have a husband after all! Just as we were comfortably settled he'd take the key to go the lavvy; and then I didn't see him for a month o' Sundays. With his head bare too—just as he'd gone; and the key with the lobster claw still in his hand. Then one was expected to pretend that nothing had happened, that he hadn't been gone five minutes; but that was what one couldn't do."

Ditte laughed.

"It's all very well for you to laugh, but I couldn't

see the fun of it. I wasn't a widow and I wasn't a wife! A blessing of kids arrived, but the father wasn't much in evidence; and so the best of my days went by. What became of them? Ah, if they aren't dead I suppose they're still alive!" Widow Rasmussen would never discuss that question. "Well, we'd better see about a bit o' supper and then get to sleep."

"There is no supper," said Ditte.

"Oh yes, there's half a loaf, I begged it from a soldier from Sölv Street Barracks when I was out. He was taking a whole sack-full to the marine stores, and so I thought I might as well beg a loaf as let the horses eat it. They aren't in want of anything. If one'd only been the gentry's horse instead of the gentry's washerwoman one would have had the bread of charity to fall back on in one's old age."

Little Peter too wished he'd been born a horse. He was always playing at horses, and he put his head through the back of the old wooden chair and neighed. The seat was the manger, and when they cut up the stale bread in small pieces and put them before him saying: Here's fodder for the horse, there was no limit to his appetite. The little girl found it more difficult, poor thing, for she hadn't a decent tooth in her mouth. But when they soaked the bread in boiling water she managed to get it down after all. "Tomorrow you'll have sugar on it," said the old woman to make it taste better.

Ditte had the newborn baby with her in the night;

it hung at her breast the whole time and looked after itself when it felt the flow. It was already quite good at finding the nipple. Next to the wall was the little girl, and Peter lay at the foot of the bed with his feet towards her. So she had them all with her and knew they were warm. The lodger had the bed with the best bedding.

She lay there listening to their calm sleep, and the rats scampering about behind the slanting boarded wall by the head of her bed, staring into the dark until it was filled with colors and rings of light as in her childhood. Then she thought of God and of Granny, Karl and Georg—of all those who had come into her existence. She had soon done with God; if he did exist she certainly had nothing to thank him for. She thought of all that Granny had said and prophesied, and wondered if any of it had come true. She didn't think there was more in store for her than she had already obtained; Ditte had no longer any illusions regarding the future. She had not become rich and great; but for all that the other part, about happiness, might well have come true. Was she happy? She did not know herself. She would ask someone or other what happiness was —someone who read books. That was where one learned about it.

CHAPTER IV.

OUR LORD.

DITTE was awakened by the chatter of the children. Something told her, before she had yet had time to think about it, that it was Sunday; perhaps it was the stillness. Even the children's voices had a special note, almost of solemnity. Weariness clung to her limbs like lead, and she remained lying quiet with veiled eyes, listening to the little ones.

Little Anna had crept down to Peter at the foot of the bed; they had put their arms round each other and sat looking at the white clouds which took up the morning sun from somewhere and threw a white sheen into the room as they passed by. The reflection appeared in one corner, moved across walls and ceiling, and disappeared in the other corner.

"That was an angel, it was," said little Anna with a determined nod.

"It wasn't, for there are no angels," replied Peter annoyed.

"Yes there is, Anna seen them herself," said the girl, slapping him across the hand.

"And I've seen myself that there aren't any," replied Peter, slapping back.

Ditte had to interfere. "Mammy's woke!" little Anna cried clapping her hands. "My mammy don't sleep any more."

"You don't believe in angels, do you?" asked Peter darkly with wrinkled brow.

Ditte did not want to reply, and turned the question on to him: "Why don't you believe in them?"

"Everybody can see that their wings wouldn't carry them," he said pointing to a scrap-book picture of a hovering angel that had been pasted on the mirror to cover a crack. Well, Ditte hadn't considered the question from that point of view; she had other reasons for doubting the existence of angels.

"Ah well, there is so much, so much I don't believe in any longer," Peter suddenly blurted out with such a deep sigh that Ditte couldn't help laughing.

"What more is there then?" she asked merrily. But she kept watch on her face, for Peter expected to be taken seriously. He was nearly seven.

"The stork!" said Peter.

"Sister believes in the stork," said Anna—just for the sake of contradicting him.

"So does Old Rasmussen!" cried Peter in a voice sharp with disdain—"she says the babies come from a marsh. But that isn't right, for then they have to lie freezing in the cold water. Little brother was better off, for he was lying in your tummy, mother."

Ditte's eyes wandered uncertainly from place to place. "I suppose there is nothing more then?" she asked to divert the question.

"How more?" Peter's voice was deep and thick; he had a fancy for sensible conversation.

"Nothing more you don't believe in, I mean."

"Oh yes. I don't believe in God at all. How could he sit up there on the clouds without tumbling down? They're running away all the time."

Ditte suddenly remembered the washing. She tore the baby from her breast—he hung there like a leech, sucking away until she felt sore right through to the back—and jumped out. "Now be good," she said, "and mother will make you a drop of coffee." She got into her petticoat and lit the oil stove; then she ran round to see what had become of Old Rasmussen today. The old woman was generally first man on deck. The doors on both sides of the long corridor were open; people were bed-making and sweeping, dust and an atmosphere of beds rolled out as a thick ooze.

Ditte slipped through the boarded gable and down to the loft of box rooms where she knocked at Widow Rasmussen's door. The old woman was in bed and had had a bad night; she wouldn't tell what was the matter.

"Then you must have taken something that didn't agree with you again," said Ditte and looked round the room. On the chest of drawers was a pillbox;

Ditte recognized it. "Where did you get that from?" she asked in surprise.

"Oh, it's some medicine they threw away at the teacher's; I found it yesterday when I carried down the slops for them. So I took three when I went to bed; I thought it might be a good thing for that back o' mine. But bad I am, whatever the reason."

Ditte laughed loudly: "But mother, it's those pills the doctor gave Fru Langhalm because she couldn't get a baby; I went to the chemist myself to fetch them for her."

The old woman had to laugh too. "I see now that they came to the wrong address; I never had such a belly-ache in all my life—. The Langhalms'll be rejoicing now—seeing as they threw away the pills. They did want babies so badly! I hope it'll be a good 'un; many kids were better unborn."

Ditte couldn't understand that, she thought all children darlings.

"Think of the missionary's kid then—there it goes again. It's been yelling all night long so one couldn't get any rest."

"That must be because they don't know how to treat it," Ditte decided.

The old woman bent towards her: "They say it's possessed by the devil," she whispered. "That's why the missionary has it himself in the night—so that he may drive out the evil spirit. They pray over it many a time during the day; and if that's no good they shut it up in the dark cupboard under the

stairs. Then they don't give it anything to eat, for the Evil One must be starved out of it."

"Do be quiet, mother," said Ditte. A shudder ran across her face and spread itself through all her being. She stood listening, quite lost; the crying cut its way right in there. Then she pulled herself together. "I'll bring your coffee presently," she said, hurrying away to her own place.

Ditte had settled the children in bed with some toys while she washed their clothes; they had no change and sat there stark naked, but it was warm enough up here under the roof this time of the year. Baby Brother lay sucking a piece of orris root, good for itching gums. She stood in the kitchen washing, the door to the long passage that cut off her room from the kitchen was open so as to give more space; the inhabitants came and went. She had closed the door to the room so they shouldn't see how untidy it was; but she could almost hear where the children were and what they were up to. Every moment she had to drop her work and run in to them; they were out of bed again and rolling about on the floor, stark naked as they were. A hundred times she put them back again and covered them up, and gave them each a slap. But it was effective for a minute only—just for as long as they were crying over the scolding and the smacks. Suddenly one would laugh through the tears and the other caught the contagion; then the game started afresh. At last she

gave it up and shut the door firmly; let them romp, as long as nobody saw them.

The neighbors ran along the passage with beer bottles and cream jugs; they must get down before the shop closed. They greeted her, the men generally with a joke, the women glancing meaningly towards the room where the children were. Ditte knew quite well what it meant! People expected such a lot where others were concerned; but what about their own mess?

A decent woman washed and mended the children's clothes on Saturday night so that they could get into them right away when they opened their eyes on Sunday morning—she knew that well enough. There was no need to tell her! But what about it when she was so tired when she got back from work that she simply fell asleep!

This was not to be taken literally: Ditte hadn't gone to sleep but had sat chatting with a neighbor while she rested a bit. And when she took up her night work she was so sleepy and fagged out that she couldn't stand on her legs. It didn't do to get out of harness; the work must be done in one stretch. Just like the old cab-horses—if once they lay down there was no getting them up again. She suffered for it now; everything was in a muddle. The kids romped about and made a nice pickle out of bedclothes, chambers and God knows what—it was enough to make an angel weep; and she herself looked worse than a gallywog, unkempt and un-

dressed as she was. She couldn't see her way through anywhere; the whole affair was sickening, and one got annoyed both with oneself and others. She would be more careful next time; she didn't want this to happen again.

Suddenly she ceased working and stood listening; the children were suspiciously quiet in there. She hurried in. They sat clustered together under the window with Baby Brother between them. The door to the little cupboard in the wall under the window—Ditte's larder—was open and they had turned the contents out on the floor. The chamber, which they had evidently dragged to the window in order to stand on it and look out, had been upset, and on top of the mess they had sprinkled a bag of flour to cover up the scandal. It did look a sight! And the good flour, too, of which she was going to make pancakes for dinner! The egg that was to make them delicious the kids had smashed and smeared into their hair; they were covered and crusted all over. Ditte laughed and cried at the same time, she made her way between them with a hard hand, scolding and shaking them. Then she dropped down on a chair and joined their crying competition. "You have something to cry for, I must say," she said half choked with sobbing—"you haven't even an idea of what you have done! Where on earth am I to get your dinner from now!" She was up again—the clothes were boiling over in the kitchen. "Now you stay there, and God help you

if you jump out on the floor again!" She planted them emphatically in the bed and rushed out into the kitchen. The kids whimpered and looked covertly towards the door.

She worked quickly for awhile to make up for lost time, but gradually the speed waned. She felt weak in the knees and in the abdomen; she was probably bleeding, too. After the birth of Baby Brother she had frequent hæmorrhages although she gave him the breast; she hadn't given herself time to recover after the confinement.

She sat meditating with her hands in her lap. Maybe she did not think at all but merely rested in a moment of complete surrender. From the building somewhere came the sound of a child's crying, so far away that it might have been singing, monotonous singing. Most likely it was the missionary's wicked child. He always cried except when he was up to mischief, they said. He was only three or four years old, but the things people said he would do were quite incredible. The parents were serious-minded people, they prayed morning and evening; it was beyond understanding that they should have such a child. A good thing it was born to parents with so much patience! Ditte knew from her own experience how easy it was to lose one's patience.

She flew up in a fright when she heard well-known steps on the stairs; she put on a blouse in a hurry

and smoothed her hair. Then she bent over her washing-board with a blushing face.

"You are doing Sunday work, I see," said Lars Peter before he was yet in. "Good day to you, my lass." His voice was a trace lower, Sine had hushed it somewhat; but it still breathed the old warmth.

Ditte wiped the kitchen chair with her apron and worked away again.

Lars Peter had been to Malmö and he sat there chatting, about the trip and other things. As Ditte did not appear to be interested, not even to the extent of asking a question, he stopped and sat looking at her for awhile. "I don't seem to be very welcome," he said at last putting his hand on her back. "How the deuce d'ye manage to get so busy on a Sunday?"

"Oh I don't know," replied Ditte shortly. "I suppose I've been lazy the other days!"

"I'm sure you haven't," laughed Lars Peter—"that wouldn't be much like you. But I suppose you have too much on your shoulders."

No, Ditte had no more than she could well manage.

"I'm not so sure about that. You're just like the tomato plants one sees in the garden everywhere now—you take too much on. If one doesn't pinch them back constantly they'll keep on setting fruit and setting fruit that they can't carry through."

"I suppose that's Sine's opinion," said Ditte. "We aren't all equally good managers."

"As far as kindliness goes you aren't much good at keeping anything back, my lass," said Lars Peter lovingly. "If only you could keep something for yourself—you have too large a heart."

Ditte laughed: "So the doctor said when I was ill. A dilated heart, he called it."

"Well, well, it's easy to joke about it—how are the kiddies?" He got up.

"They're asleep," said Ditte. "They woke up so early." She unconsciously took a step towards the door; but Lars Peter was already there.

"They have a queer way of sleeping then," he laughed as he opened the door. The little ones had heard him, and in their eagerness to get out first they tumbled out of the bed and were lying sprawling on the floor with the bedclothes on top. They clung to him and stuck to his bulging pockets. "Have you got something for us?" they cried and tore at him.

After his country trips there was generally something hidden away in Lars Peter's immense pockets. This time there were both apples and pears under his woollen gloves and his handkerchief; they had been there for awhile and were both bruised and dirty, but the taste was exquisite. And out of his inner pocket he pulled something for Ditte—a pork sausage, half a yard long. "That is from Sand's Farm," said he—"from the Bailiff's! Do you remember—the people that used to take you in and drive you home when you were children and rambled about on your own."

Ditte remembered it well, but it seemed so far back. It might be a hundred years ago, and she had no time to occupy herself with thoughts of the past. Now she has something for dinner, and when her father had gone she would get the children's clothes ready.

"Well, I'd better get home," said Lars Peter, as if he guessed her thoughts.

She had not been alone for long before well-known steps again sounded on the stairs. Ditte blushed in good earnest; Karl was the last person in the world she wanted to see in her present muddled state. He shook hands silently and straddled across the kitchen chair, although she didn't ask him to sit down. "I see you are busy," he said after a while.

"I am. I wish you'd go and come back in an hour —I shall have finished by then." She spoke vehemently.

"Very well. I thought you *had* finished. It's nearly eleven." He got up composedly.

"Well, what about it! I can't help that!"

"No, I don't suppose you can." He put his hand on the door to her room.

"I won't have you in there now," said Ditte seizing him by the arm. "I haven't tidied up."

"It won't be in a worse state because I'm there."

She heard him talking to the children but couldn't bring herself to go in; she stood biting her lower lip to prevent herself from crying. "What's the mat-

ter with you?" she heard him say, "are you lying there snoozing this time of the day? Hurry up and get your clothes on, and we'll go out on the common and see if we can find the cake-stalls."

"But we haven't got any clothes until mother's finished washing," said Peter.

Karl appeared in the doorway: "Poor things, then they can't get up today."

"I'll iron them dry," said Ditte without looking at him, "I'll have finished presently."

"There won't be time for that. What a pity—they get out so seldom."

Ditte broke out in bitter weeping: "Is it my fault? Can I help having to go to work from early morning till late at night so I can't look after them properly—just for the sake of scraping together the food for them? Perhaps you think I'm gossiping on the stairs, or lazing my time away in bed?"

No, Karl knew she didn't do that. "But you might perhaps arrange things a little differently," he said putting his arm soothingly round her shoulders. But she shook him off and bent over her work, turning her back on him. He stood irresolute for awhile, then he left.

Ditte was upset—and sorry; dissatisfied with the whole world, and more so with herself. She knew quite well what he meant when he said she might arrange things differently. But what was the use of his good intentions when she *had* to slap the proffered hand?

"One must have someone to tyrannize and tread on," said Old Rasmussen one day with unmistakable aim at Ditte's behavior towards Karl—"and so the person who shows one most consideration is generally chosen!" The old woman was right, though Ditte didn't like to admit it to herself. But today she saw it.

She always regretted it—afterwards—when she had been abrupt and offish towards him; but she repeated it nevertheless. She couldn't help it, there was something in her which—against her wish and will—was always rubbed up the wrong way where Karl was concerned. To all appearance there was no barrier, but it shut her off for all that. She was like a hen that is unable to cross the chalked line.

If he would only assert himself and not leave the decision to her! He had a husband's right over her once and for all; Ditte often wondered why he didn't insist upon it. He was patiently waiting for something to arise in her; what it was she didn't understand, and she sometimes wondered if he was a real man. If *she* had to propose to him he would have to wait a long time!

And with it all she couldn't free her mind of him. She would treat him most impudently, almost slightingly, and as soon as he was out of the door she repented and was seized with fear that he'd had enough of it and might not come back again. His respect made her observe herself; what quality in her made him treat her as delicately as if she were

a high-born lady—and a virgin to boot? He saw something in her of which she herself was not aware —and the existence of which she doubted. But that was probably part of his make up; he had always been highfaluting.

He no longer sought the pious people, but he had not given up his search for God. Together with other young working men he had formed a club where they met for discussions. They had some queer ideas—he was still off his rocker! They said that man was a holy being—however lowly his external circumstances,—and that God was to be found in themselves. Ditte didn't understand a word of it all, and sometimes she could scarcely help laughing because Karl took these questions so seriously. "That is because your soul is still slumbering," he would say. He recognized no laws except his own conscience, and believed that existence would be quite different when the poor awoke to an understanding of their own inviolability. Then they would no longer submit to being trampled on, they would revolt. Man was a holy being, he said. And from this Ditte concluded that he still considered himself as such, although he no longer sought the holy crowd.

Ditte was well aware that there comes an end to everything, and while she struggled to get ready she was tormented by the thought that he might not be coming back in the afternoon. Well, let him stay away then, she thought defiantly. But she struggled

on nevertheless, and the work progressed speedily. Soon the last garment hung on the line in front of the kitchen window, rustling in the autumn wind, while she ironed what was already half dry. She would show him that she was ready and had made the children look clean and smart if he came to take them for a walk. He wouldn't find occasion to pity them again'

When the clock struck twelve at Rosenborg Ditte had the children dressed and her flat tidied up, and she felt a new being. Her harshness had disappeared; everybody was welcome to see how she managed her affairs, there was no need to show fight now. Her cheeks were red and she looked quite beautiful as she tied the ribbon round Sister's hair. "There now, Peter and little Anna hold each other's hand and go round and show Old Rasmussen how smart you are. Mother'll get the dinner ready," she said pushing them out into the passage. "Tell her mother'll bring her dinner presently."

"Oh, we're having pancakes for dinner," they said.

"You bet! You spoil the flour mother was going to use, and the egg as well, but for all that you expect the pancakes to appear! No, the cat's run off with them. Now trot off."

"Naughty cat, gustin' cat," said Sister as they toddled along the passage. Ditte couldn't help laughing—they hadn't grasped a thing! And people

thought they could put things straight with the cane! She would keep an eye on herself in future and not allow her annoyance to get the upper hand. It was a good thing children forgot so soon; they didn't bear malice.

The little ones sat chattering round the table, in high spirits at the sight of the sausage which Ditte had fried whole. There it lay in a ring on the plate as if it had neither beginning nor end. "And now you may eat as much as you like," she said. Peter declared that he could eat the whole lot himself. "Poor mother's sausage!" laughed Ditte. "Then there'd be nothing left for us!" But the usual thing happened—their eyes were bigger than their bellies. Suddenly Peter and Anna declared they'd had enough. Baby Brother also had his share; he was still a weakling, but good at real food.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE COMMON.

DITTE had made Old Rasmussen tidy; she had washed her and combed her hair and shaken up her bed. Poor old soul! She hadn't been able to resist, in spite of her stomach ache, but had taken yet another pill and now she felt wretchedly bad. She couldn't get accustomed to the fact that she would not remain hale and active forever; she didn't realize that she was old and frail. If something went wrong with her it must always be some external thing or other that had found its way into her system; then she would try every possible and impossible means of driving it out again. Ditte took away the pills to avoid further mischief.

Ditte and the children were enjoying their Sunday afternoon. She was sitting by the window with both of them on her lap, looking down into the yard where the inhabitants of the middle block came and went; little Georg was asleep. The children down there were playing; they had opened a shop on top of the dustbins, and the lavatories as well were included in their game. One urchin balanced himself along the roof of the lavatories, and from there he

climbed on the stable where he was dancing about. The stable belonged to the neighboring property, and Mother Geismar—the stairwoman in there—came with a pole to chase him back to his own side. Perhaps she imagined she was the agent! Every time she lunged out at him he jumped about, behaving like a savage.

Mother Jew, Mother Jew,
Cream for me and gin for you!

he sang, and then she stabbed at him and scolded. Peter laughed until he nearly lost his breath. "But that isn't nice of me," he suddenly said, seriously. Then he had to laugh again.

No, of course it wasn't right; but after all Ditte thought the stairwoman deserved it—she was so treacherous. Why was she so cringing to the agent? But Ditte was not quite accountable—she was sitting there meditating. First she thought how nice it was to have finished work—then her mind wandered to the sad fact that she had overslept; but it merely touched that idea, lingering longest over the children's babble:—the Lord! Peter didn't believe in him; that wasn't bad for a boy of his age—there was no knowing how far he might go in the world. Old Rasmussen believed in God in her own way. "Oh, he does exist," she said when the children asked her—"but he isn't at home when we want him. All fine gentlemen are like that!" And she herself—did she believe in him? Ditte wasn't

sure—she hadn't seen much evidence of him! If he did exist he hadn't been very successful, at any rate; the world wasn't up to much, neither were the people in it. There was never anything surprising in them, for they always acted according to their own convenience. Karl was the only man whose actions weren't obvious. He would sit looking at one with eyes that, as it were, looked in from the unknown, and one couldn't help thinking of him when one did something wrong. Was that something in God's line? But he was no longer a believer — as far as she knew. She would speak to him about it!

All the rest was straight forward and had more to do with the devil than with God. One froze and starved—even if one did one's best; the landlord always avoided the necessary repairs, but God help the one that was as much as one hour late with the rent. The grocer gave short measure, and sold eighteen sticks of wood to the score if he got the chance. The baker and his lady in the front block did everything themselves, and still they couldn't make ends meet. There was no God needed to keep up that state of things. The poor man was like a sheep which everybody was allowed to shear. "May God temper the wind for you!" they said lovingly, and cut right down to the skin.

Was that the Lord's business? Did he shield the knaves, seeing they always had his name on their lips? Granny had said that he kept in with the

great folks and hoed their potatoes; and things hadn't altered lately. But it paid to keep him on the lips! Mother Geismar was a stairwoman just like Ditte, and nothing else. But the Vicar visited her, and the ladies of the congregation gave her food and clothes—she was even given yearly grants! Just because she ran to all the church meetings. "Come along!" she would say to Ditte—"One can't afford to refuse anything in times like these!" But Ditte didn't want to go; and what would be the good of it after all? She wasn't a Jewess, they couldn't indulge their Home-missionary propensities on her. Mother Geismar allowed herself to be conquered by the various creeds in turn; in the buildings they had nicknamed her the Challenge Cup. When one congregation had lost interest in her and there was nothing more to be had, she let herself be converted to some other faith. The congregation always felt happy and generous towards the newly converted; it was they that kept the collections going. On this and their stair-scrubbing she lived quite comfortably.

The baker's man was putting the covered handcart into the shed—he was late today. He glanced towards her window as usual, and Ditte drew back her head. But it was too late—she had to nod back to him! Now there'd be something for the women to gossip about! He was from Jutland and could never learn to speak real Danish; but he was a handsome and respectable man, well liked by everybody

in the neighborhood. He had been with the bakers for fifteen years—ever since they started. "You ought to accept him," said the baker's lady whenever Ditte set foot in the shop—"he is quite gone on you. And he is so solid. My husband often says: 'God only knows how we should get on without Læborg.' " He certainly was a respectable man—everybody could see that. But——

Every now and then Ditte glanced towards the front building, the bedrooms and kitchens of which turned this way. Fru Langhalm had opened her windows and was tidying up. If it was really true, that matter regarding the pills, then there would be rejoicing; and not merely over there—for everybody had, as it were, a share in her. The husband was quite fifteen years younger than she, and the exciting question through several years had been: Will it last? The women in the building were agreed that she must take care to give him a child; otherwise he would tire of her sooner or later. Several times the rumor had gone abroad that now she was with child; she herself went about with an expression of guarding the sweetest of secrets, and some people really thought they noticed something in her appearance. But each time it passed over and nobody was really able to point to anything definite. "She has stuffed herself up to keep her hold of him," said the women—"or maybe it's hysteria that's blown her out." But whether imagination or tricks, it would prove a dangerous sport in the long run; it would

be a mercy if she were at last really in the family way. Handsome she was not, and, as already mentioned, she was fifteen years older than her husband. But she was nice; she didn't look down on those that lived in the back building. And she fought the common battle—to keep their hold on *him* was about the most important thing for all of them. They felt kindly disposed towards her.

There were many decent people in the middle and back buildings, too. Ditte felt a peculiar satisfaction in affirming this to herself. Whole families, husband, wife and children appeared from the various entrances and passed through the gate; they were going out for a walk—maybe to the Common. The children walked with arms well out from their clothes and scarcely dared to put their feet to the ground, and the mother pulled at them and shook them by the arms—she dressed the line like a sergeant. The father walked behind to see that they put their feet down properly; he scolded if they got the point of the boot down the cracks between the paving stones, or wore the heels down on one side. It wasn't all fun to be a poor man's child and look decently dressed. Ditte thought of her own childhood and of the good time she had had with her bare legs. Nobody scolded you for tearing them!

There! The fisherman from the Devil's Isle came rambling with two nice pals—three downright soakers they looked, and they were drunk already. That

was no joke for poor Marianne, especially if she'd got nothing to put before them. She hadn't had her week's money either—she'd had to borrow coffee and beer last night. They lived in the garret opposite, and there was often trouble in the night; she had spent more than one night on the stairs in her bare shift.

Ditte opened the window and called out: "Marianne, you're having visitors!"

"Thanks, I've seen them already!" replied Marianne appearing in the window. She was putting her hat on with shaking hands. If only she could get out before they arrived—she could take the way across the loft.

A moment later there was a knock and Marianne tiptoed in. "I'm off," she said—"I'll leave them to it. Don't you believe I'm taking a thrashing because there's neither beer nor brandy."

One could hear them fussing about over there. "Now they're at the larder," she giggled. "Oh Lor', I shouldn't like to be over there now and be Marianne!" She put her thumbs in her mouth and her knees bent under her with giggling. "Well, ta-ta—I'm off to Alleenberg!"*

There, the missionary's were going out—or lay-preacher, or whatever he was. He wore a long, black coat like an undertaker's; and his face also was long, as if he were carrying a corpse, or pre-

*Low class summer amusement resort.

tended to be praying inwardly. They are going to a prayer-meeting or something—the child was left at home as usual. They had locked it in then, poor little thing; its crying still lingered in Ditte's ear.

Strange about that weeping. If one thought or spoke of the child, there immediately, as if calling for help, was the sound of the weeping—it trickled along the loft, cut sharply through, and trickled along again. At other times it was not noticeable, one's ears were so accustomed to it. It was as if the child could feel that someone was thinking about it. It was all so sad about that possessed child; Ditte trembled when she thought of it.

Peter and Anna were impatient, so she gave them permission to run out on the stairs and watch for Uncle Karl. "But on the first landing only," said Ditte definitely; they must not go down into the yard. She gave Baby Brother the breast and fetched the perambulator, so that everything should be ready. She also was impatient. The perambulator was a gift from Lars Peter; she was taking it out for the first time today.

There the Congratulator was getting up; she heard him yawn and go into the kitchen for water She went out to see if there was anything he wanted. "You *have* had a proper snooze today, Hr. Kramer!" she said.

"Yes, one's got to make it up on Sundays," he said rustily. "On week-days I must get up so early

—for the sake of the business." He had patches of blue goose-flesh and looked awful after the sleep, baggy and blown.

"Pooh, you're the right one to speak about getting up early," Ditte laughed. "You ought to go to bed at proper hours." He mumbled something, but Ditte didn't care. He must put up with being told the truth.

It was rich to hear him speak about the business! He had to be at Amager Market before nine to beg scraps of flowers for the bouquets with which he importuned everybody—that was all. Some persons didn't mind enjoying life at other people's expense. But she would turn him out presently! He owed two months' rent, they couldn't keep on in this way!

Karl arrived at last, dragging both children with him. He had hurried and was quite wet with perspiration. "Excuse me; I had to go to a meeting, and it lasted rather long," he said.

"A meeting?" Ditte looked at him in surprise. Had he started running to meetings again!

"Yes, it was about the Union—we are trying to gather the malcontents into an Opposition. The Executive are sitting there sabotaging everything."

The children were so fond of Karl, although he was quiet and did not romp about with them much. They walked along silently, each of them holding one of his hands, perfectly happy. Now and then they would peep at him intimately. "You're our daddy," said Anna.

"Not really," said Peter wisely, "but we're pretending! For you're sure to marry mother—so Old Rasmussen says." Karl gave him a nod and secretly glanced back; Ditte was walking somewhat behind with the pram, she had heard nothing. They went down Sölv Street and out to the common where they sat down on the grass to look at the youths playing ball and showing off their strength. Karl had brought a packet of food, but it was too early yet to eat.

"Why are you so serious?" asked Ditte. "Have you had bad news from home?"

Karl smiled and shook his head—it was no use being upset by things at home. "No, it's something else—they're trying to break our Union; and when that is done wages will come down. We are earning too much, they say! A worker must earn no more than will keep the skin around his bones."

"But can't you work against them—so it won't be broken?"

"Well, it won't go to pieces, I suppose—the leaders will see to that. They would lose their jobs then, and have to start work again; I know that wouldn't suit them. But I'm afraid they may sell us and the Union to the contractors—to save their own positions."

"I'll tell you what—you ought to get hold of Pelle," said Ditte with conviction. "He would put matters straight for you." Karl laughed.

"Oh yes, he has the gift of the gab," he said

slightly ironically, "but there's not much powder left in him—however great he may have been once. He's burned out, you see! And he doesn't want to have anything to do with the new ideas. He's planting cabbage at the Bispebjærg Settlement, and believes the world is going to be saved by co-operative societies and small-holdings. Every man his own cabbage, is his watchword!"

"Oh, you're only making fun. He does a lot for the cause of the workers, I'm sure. Everybody says that."

"Oh yes, he does a lot for the relief of the poor—that is his field. He wants all workers to have outdoor relief—only it musn't have the effect of poor-law relief. For then they'll lose the vote, you see."

"But it's surely a good thing to keep your vote—otherwise you aren't a real human being!"

"A real voting sheep, you mean!"

"As far as I can see what he does is all to the good," Ditte maintained obstinately. "Think of Old Rasmussen with her mangy ten kroner a month, much as she has toiled all her life—and she gets them as outdoor relief! And all those that have accidents at their work—and the unemployed! Must they have no help? I think you are too hard."

"There are many besides you that think so," said Karl seriously. "You and your help! They want justice, and one doesn't go begging for that."

"If the poor man has to wait for justice, he'll

have to wait for a long time!" Ditte had some experience on that point.

"Better that he should wait then. But you are thinking merely of what would be best for the body. You don't think of the soul. What good would it be for the poor if they gained the whole world, and lost their own souls?"

Ditte felt a pang. There he was again with his fads—just as in former days at the farm when he went about in dread that his soul would be lost. "You and your soul," she said. "Can you live on it, may I ask?"

"No, one certainly cannot eat it," Karl replied with a smile—"but at any rate, one cannot very well be without it and not become an animal. All I mean is that our position is on a par with that of the peasants' cattle. The mean peasant starves his stock, the wise man feeds them well even if they are doing no work—but they remain beasts nevertheless. People are *doing something* for the workers—just as they do something for the protection of animals and the feeding of newly-hatched fish. The whole thing is on the wrong track; we must try to become human beings and take our fate into our own hands!"

The children were pulling at him the whole time —they wanted him to play with them. "You really must leave Uncle alone," said Ditte time after time. But they persisted. "You can chat some other time," said Peter sulkily.

This acted on Karl like an electric shock; he jumped up and pulled off his coat. "And what do you want to play, then?" he asked merrily. He had to get down on all fours and be their elephant, and the children sat on his back, Peter with his legs dangling backwards. Baby Brother flung his arms about, he wanted to take part in the fun too. "How clever he is already!" said Ditte proudly. She put him in front of the others, right out on the elephant's neck, steadying him as she walked by their side; he whooped with delight. That was clever of a four months' kiddie!

Many working class families had come out on the Common in the fine weather. Several of them had brought food and they shared the baskets between them; they were lying in big groups discussing politics while they ate. The youngsters played ball or tried to imitate the tricks they had seen the acrobats do at the Circus. Then the older men caught it from the youngsters; they threw off their coats and began wrestling; there was a perfect craze among the workers for wrestling matches. "See how crazy they all are," said Ditte; she watched their arches and half-Nelsons happily.

"The working man feels his strength, but he doesn't know how to apply it. So he plays at Strong Man!" said Karl.

He met many acquaintances here and seemed very popular; every now and then somebody came

up to shake hands: "How d'ye do? You've got the family out today!"

"Hadn't you better go, and leave us to look after ourselves," said Ditte. "Your comrades will be thinking you've got married and let yourself in for three children."

Karl laughed: "Supposing we let people think what they like?" Ditte was too anxious about other people's opinions and beliefs!

"Ah well, you don't mind anybody," replied Ditte half proudly. This wasn't the old Karl after all—the boy that used to cry for fear of punishment. Well, she had no objection to being seen with a man!

Laborer Jensen from Adel Street came up to them. They sat down to share the packets of food. Jensen had been out of work all week and felt downhearted. "What'll happen when winter comes?" he said despondently. "Previously it was only during the cold weather, when the frost shut down everything, that we couldn't get work. It is hard to believe one is living in an organized society."

Karl also had been out of work several days during the summer, and the same complaint was heard from all quarters. "The better organization and the worse we shall naturally find existence," he said. "Those that can afford to have more than necessities are getting fewer and fewer; the machines and a couple of men should be able to supply their wants."

Madam* Jensen looked at him in alarm: "And what about the rest of us then?"

"Well, we can always lie down and die."

"That's a nice way out—in a free country! Oh no, it isn't as bad as all that!" cried Jensen.

"I don't know—perhaps that is where liberty comes in. Do you think there's any other kind of freedom for slaves than the right to snuff it? But we've got hold of the wrong end of the stick; it isn't we that have got the freedom—not even to snuff it when we want to. It's the others that have the freedom—to let us die when they can use us no longer. That's how I look at it! I think it's Democracy they call it. In former days, before they'd invented democracy, they were bound to look after the slaves even if they were of no use. But then the Americans —who are supposed to be well up in modern labor questions—discovered that it didn't pay. So they invented Liberty, don't you see; they thrashed the Southern States until they agreed to chase the slaves out in the desert when there was no work for them."

"The devil they did! I don't quite get that!" said Jensen, taken aback. "That's too clever for me!"

Karl sat chewing for awhile, annoyed that he was unable to express himself so as to be understood.

*A married woman of the working class in Denmark is addressed as Madam, as distinct from the term Frue used for women of the upper and middle classes.

Then he tried another tack: "Now look here, Jensen—if a farmer wants a couple of working horses, or a milch-cow, he must do something to get them. He must keep a mare—which isn't much use for work when it's with foal, and he must pay to have it covered. Then he has to keep the foal for a couple of years before it's of any use to him. Do you think he would go to all that expense if he could go out on the Common and fetch a horse or a cow every time he wanted one—eh?"

"No-o, he'd hardly be as stupid as all that," admitted Jensen hesitatingly.

"But that's exactly what they do to us—push us out and fetch us back according to their own convenience; where we'll get the food from in between is our own affair. That is liberty, my boy!"

"Rather a novel definition of liberty, I should say," said Jensen. "I haven't met it before."

"No, I don't suppose I could expect you to believe me. But you ought to go and hear Morten, he is speaking about Liberty of Slaves on Wednesday in the Timberman Inn—that is just near your place. He'll tell you about it!"

"Morten, why—he isn't a learned chap, he's a working man like the rest of us. No, I go to the Liberal Lectures for Working Men; you know what you get there. It's professors and that kind of fellows that speak there, but they aren't afeared of slashing at present conditions. The Liberals are on our side, they are!"

"Yes, just as the fox is on the side of the geese!" Karl laughed. A group of workers had gradually collected round them; they listened in silence. Karl had the feeling that most of them agreed with Jensen.

"The Liberals—why, they're bankers, big merchants and that sort! You don't think it's for our good they want to link arms with us, do you? They simply want to crawl up on our backs. The little man always has to offer his back when the big man wants a ride."

"He'll soon be as extreme as his master Morten," said one of the crowd aloud.

"Hear, hear!" shouted another. "But he's a good writer, is Morten!" he added leniently.

"How is it—he and Pelle are from the same neighborhood, aren't they?" said Jensen. "They even went to the same school, I heard. But they don't get on very well. At a meeting the other day Morten called Pelle the Salvation Army General!" The men laughed; it was a good hit. He could be very nasty.

"Yes, that is very good—if there's anything the whole show resembles it's the Salvation Army," Karl snapped. He didn't look a bit like himself, usually he was calm and quiet and moderate in his expressions. Hunger had had its teeth in them. But suddenly he pulled himself together and smiled. Well, we won't let that separate us," he said.

"To hell with the splitters!" an old man cried and walked away demonstratively.

Ditte had listened in silence. Often some question arose in her, but she kept it to herself. She didn't know who was right, perhaps it would have been difficult to tell—men argued themselves into so many questions; but she was sorry that Jensen had the majority on his side. There was no sense in that, Karl being the better man both in work and in everything else. And she resented them all poking fun at the Salvation Army. She had been to their meetings several times last winter; they had a warm room and music, and nobody criticized her dress. But then, the men had their taverns.

"Do the peasants really give the mares less work when they are in foal?" she asked on the way home.

"The sensible peasants do," Karl replied.

"But then the beasts are much better off than we!" Ditte recalled her own toiling right up to the moment she was confined.

"Yes, of course the beasts are better off. But then, they'll do for food when they are finished—that makes all the difference."

Ditte looked at him. It was impossible to tell whether he spoke in earnest or was joking. Then the question from earlier in the day came into her mind; it might be as well to get that put straight—Karl was so clever. "Once you were thinking so much about God," she said. "Do you still believe he exists?"

Karl did not reply immediately. "Of course he exists!" he said in deadly earnest, with an expression almost of pain. "But he is no good to us. The Lord was created by the others, so that they might use him to torture us; and he does that all right. At one time I believed I could persuade him to become my father too, but that is impossible. Nobody can serve both the oppressed and the oppressor."

"But you say it's we that believe in him—not the others," protested Ditte.

"Yes, that is just why he's invented—to keep us in order. God help the others if they had to rely merely upon the protection of the police. We, the oppressed, must create our own God, and we *will* create him, too! But that will be a God of Justice, the father of widows and orphans and all who suffer evil."

"And what do you mean to make him from?" said Ditte disdainfully. "The amount of kindness you'd need for that doesn't exist in this world."

"Oh yes it does. For we shall make him out of the hearts and hands of the poor. Then he will be good enough!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE RATS.

LITTLE Georg was a real glutton. He hung at Ditte's breast all night long so she felt quite empty in the morning. Whether she changed him over in her sleep, or he managed it himself—he emptied both breasts. He was wise to look after himself, for in the daytime he got nothing. As soon as Ditte had finished her morning work she put him into the cradle basket and hurried with him through the dark, cold streets to the crèche. She did that on her way to work. There wasn't much fun in having a baby in that way, but she must be thankful she had somewhere to put him. And she hoped he would not catch some children's disease. There were about a score of children at the crèche, and contagious diseases always seemed to run rampant among them.

The other two had to look after themselves at home. She lit the fire before she left, made their coffee and put their food ready; Peter could manage to put the coffeepot on the stove to warm it. But he must not meddle with the fire; Carman Olsen's wife along the passage would slip in and

see to it. There were many other things the children must not do—a long list of them. The mother repeated it every morning, and with her life in her hands she kissed them goodbye, and with her heart in her mouth she sped home at night carrying Baby Brother. So many things might have happened!

But heaven be praised, she was lucky—nothing did happen. Peter was a steady little fellow who did not play stupid tricks. He and Anna had been told to stay in bed until it was light; and there was no need to repeat it. The rats were always scampering about in the dark, and there was the Bogey. He lived under the bed and in the corners—wherever it was pitch dark; he and the dark were really one. Only the darkness under the quilt had nothing to do with him; sleep lived there, and dreams. The Bogey couldn't get into the bed at all; there they were safe from everything.

But it sometimes happened that one had to get up; Sister especially was frequently overtaken by that misfortune. "You get up," said Peter, "don't be frightened. When you *must* get up nothing can harm you. That's what Uncle Karl says; you just go straight on."

"You come, too," said Anna and took his hand. But he didn't feel quite safe then.

"No—I haven't *got* to get up," he explained, "that's why I daren't. But if I had to!"

Then Sister had to go alone. She put her head out from under the quilt and whispered *Pax;* she

got her little feet out on the floor and again said *Pax,* this time in a louder voice to be sure they heard her, and whimpered. But when she had finished and was under the quilt again she felt very brave. Then they would lie chatting, listening to the rats scampering behind the boarded wall. The rats would not dare to come out in the room; mother wouldn't have it. She was cross when they gnawed their way through, and she filled the hole with crushed glass. She also made pancakes with squills to kill them—they did that at home at the Crows-Nest. "You may save yourself the trouble," Old Rasmussen said —"for nothing will kill the rats in here. The rats are like the people here—they can't get it strong enough. What is poison to ordinary beings is spice to them." And she was right; the pancakes disappeared, but the rats remained! Every night they came, scraping the wood-work and demanding more pancake with squills.

When it was quite light the children got up. Peter washed Anna's face and buttoned up her bodice; then she ran around to Old Rasmussen to have her hair combed, whilst he balanced the big coffeepot on the stove. There was bread and butter under a plate, and the mother had put sugar and cream into their cups, ready for the coffee to be poured in. But there was that about the sugar and cream at the bottoms of the cups—it tasted so desperately nice; they had to lick a little, and a little bit more, and just a weeny bit more. And before they

knew a word about it there was nothing left, and they had to drink their coffee black. The great secret was to taste so that it didn't dwindle, and they tried it over again every day. But neither of them succeeded.

When breakfast was over the room must be tidied up. They had not been asked to do that; but Peter was a good little chap, and he got the idea all by himself. Then the mother wouldn't have to do it when she came home at night! He was an orphan, he had no foolish parents to copy, said Old Rasmussen. That was why he was so kind and considerate. Sister, on the other hand, must have been born when her parents were out of work; she didn't over-exert herself—at any rate not with doing anything useful. If the old woman said: Can Sister go fetch Old Rasmussen's specs? the little girl shook her head energetically: Sister is so tired, she would say. But she knew very well how to look after herself. She would surely grow up a real lady!

When they had finished they took each other's hand and went over to Old Rasmussen to see if there was anything she wanted. Peter ran errands for her; she could trust him both with bottles and money. Sometimes they did not stop at the old woman's door, but walked on, across many lofts, to look at the baker's rats dancing. When they had toddled on for a long time—past many locked boxrooms through the railed doors of which they caught a glimpse of many wonderful things—and

then turned round a chimney and tumbled down one step into darkness, they suddenly found themselves by a railed gable. The baker's chimney went right through it and it was lovely and warm; and in there, in the semi-darkness, the rats were playing among the flour-sacks. They were always happy, the baker's rats, and that was because they had enough to eat. There were both big and small; the little ones played and the old ones ran up and down the sacks and planks. They could run as quickly up the wall as Peter could run along the floor. They gnawed at the sacks that lay across the plank; the flour drizzled down on the floor, and the little ones came along and licked it up. When they had got their mouths full they sat up on their hind legs munching it—and suddenly they would play again. It looked awfully funny; but one had to be as quiet as a mouse. And suddenly—when a baby rat came rolling like a ball of wool into the streak of light—Sister could contain herself no longer and cried: I want that ducky little one! And off they flew.

"You're a real silly!" said Peter; and then they trotted back across the lofts again.

Up here in the darkness there lived some people too. But they didn't really count. From the space under the eaves behind Old Rasmussen's room a mattress stuck out. Beard of Hearts lived there; he had to get down on all fours when he wanted to get into his den. He was feeble-minded, and that

was his means of livelihood; if one held a ten-öre* and a two-öre piece out to him he always chose the two-öre. Peter had tried it himself once when he was going to the baker for Old Rasmussen and was given a copper for sweets. But the old woman laughed at him for being such a silly. "He's not as mad as you think," she said—"he knows what he's doing. He's made a lot of money out of other people's silliness." He got his name from a long, long beard he had once—so long and beautiful that he could get whichever girl he wanted in all the world for his sweetheart. That was his livelihood then. But then one of his sweethearts cut off his beard while he slept so that his strength left him. So now he went begging in the big restaurants and night clubs where he gave his idiot-performance; and the police left him alone—because he was dotty. Lots of money he got, his den was quite full. "You go and look for yourself," the old woman said. "The mattress is stuffed with nothing but coppers!" But Peter dared not do that, he was afraid of him.

But he dared go into the Ragpicker's den—the dark hole behind the chimney. There he slept on a heap of rags, and up against the chimney stood a box with a candle-end and a box of matches, and an old pack of cards. The children often looked in to see if the old man was at home. Occasionally he had some broken toy for them which he had picked out of a dustbin. When his sign, the mystic figure

*Ten-öre—A small silver coin. Two-öre—A larger copper coin.

Seven, hung outside the chimney it signified that he was at home. He had put some old sacks on a line so that they formed a wall towards the loft, and on the other side of the wall he was sitting with his candle alight, sorting the morning's harvest. "Oh, you've come to visit the Knight of the Sign of Seven?" he said happily. Then they were allowed to poke about, the contents of the sack were turned out on the floor, and they revelled in all the treasures of the dustbins. He was on all fours, sorting the rags in one heap and the rusty tins in another; even the old paper was to be sold again. If they found something they liked, the remains of an old picture book or a broken toy, they were allowed to keep it. "But don't you let your mammy see it," said the old Ragpicker—"she's so tidy." Oh, no—it got no further than to Old Rasmussen; they had gradually accumulated a whole store there which the mother knew nothing about. The scraps of food he found among the rubbish he put on one side, carefully cleansing them with his knife; then he ate them.

"Ugh, it's dirty!" said Sister.

"Oh no, a nip o' brandy'll settle it all right. But you'd better hop off and get home to good, kind Mother Ditte," he would say suddenly and push them outside the partition.

"He might well call her that," said Old Rasmussen. "If Mother Ditte hadn't looked after him last winter and given him something warm now and then, heaven only knows what would have become

of him. We poor old devils must thank the Lord for our kind Mother Ditte."

There were other rats in the building besides the baker's, but they were more vicious. Marianne had to hoist up her food in a basket under the ceiling every night—that is if she had any food. And the missionary's little boy was badly bitten by rats one day when he had been locked in the dark hole and forgotten overnight.

The children spent a couple of hours every day sitting by the window, looking at the other children playing in the yard; they faithfully clung to each other so as not to be tempted to lean too far out over the roof-gutter. When they were sitting by the window it was possible to have it open; otherwise they had to keep it shut—because of the rats. They were walking along the roof-gutter, appearing suddenly out of a drain pipe as if it were the top of a staircase—right in front of one's nose—walking the whole round, bustling and sniffing the air, looking ever so funny. When the rain drove the children out of the yard they took possession of the roofs of the outhouses and gambolled about down there. But in the night-time it was still worse. When the moon shone into the yard one could see them literally lying in wait in the entrances to the cellars; and no sooner had the baker put his sheets of bread out to cool on the roofs of the outhouses than the rats were at it, before he'd even had time to turn away. Old Rasmussen had seen it when she

sat up with the women of the building who were expecting babies. One could actually see the rats getting their noses burned on the hot rolls. Then they'd whirl round, squealing and rubbing their noses with their paws.

The day often seemed long to the children, especially in the afternoon when they had exhausted all their own sources of entertainment and Old Rasmussen wanted to sleep. Then perhaps Sister conquered, and they took each other by the hand and went out to look for mother. Peter was wise enough not to venture outside the known territory willingly. But life in the street would captivate them; there were shop windows full of glorious things that made one forget everything and enticed one further and further away; and before they knew anything about it they had lost their way. Then Sister started blubbering, and ultimately Peter was affected and lost his head so that he could scarcely recognize his own street. They escaped with whole skins, and Old Rasmussen scolded and wiped their tears. "We'd better say nothing to Mother Ditte," she said. But Ditte got it from the other women when she came home at night. It did not make her happy.

But fortunately there was an end to it at last; Old Rasmussen got out of bed one day, quite restored from the effect of the pills. And a God's miracle it was, for they were powerful things after all! One had only to look at the teacher's wife—she properly stomached her way about. And her

husband was so tender towards her. If she went down to the lavatory he'd come running after her with a shawl and put it round her through the rails.

One morning as the children looked in, Old Rasmussen was putting on her petticoats.

"Are you well again, Rasmussen?" they asked excitedly. "Quite well?"

"You'd better believe I am!" she replied and hopped across the floor like a magpie.

They laughed until their little throats were fairly hoarse. "More, more!" they cried.

"No more now, for I must get my winter's finery on." Old Rasmussen pulled yet another petticoat over her head—and there it stuck, and she could get it neither up nor down; that often happened, to the children's huge delight. It was because of those stiff shoulders; they were full of old rheumatism, and sometimes they wouldn't swing back when she had put her arms up. Then she stood there with her woolen petticoat round her head and could see nothing.

"Where are you, dearies?" she asked, pretending to be put out.

"Here we are. And my name is Anna Svendsen, but Peter is called only Peter, for he's got no parents. Can't you see us?" Sister asked dead serious.

"No, but I can see heaven," replied the old woman, struggling to get the petticoat down. "And up there Cadging Joe is riding on the devil's back

—no, I'm blessed if it isn't on the Relief Officer's back! Who-op—if he'd only whack 'im well. But he's too soft, poor fool!"

"What more do you see? Are they riding to God?"

But then the woolie slipped into position and there was nothing more to be seen. But it seemed only reasonable that Cadging Joe was on his way to God to complain about the Relief Officer. If only Old Rasmussen had been there, then he'd have copped it! She knew more about those fellows than they could stand up to.

"Who's Cadging Joe?" the children asked. "Is he a strong man?"

"Lor' yes, he's that strong! He's that strong he has to go with his hands in his pockets."

"Can he fight everybody?" asked Peter in a thick, deep voice, pushing out his tummy.

"That he can, but he's a silly sort of a softy. Everybody sweeps him aside and treats him like a dog, and he puts up with it. A poor, kind fool, that's what he is."

"Sister's very sorry for him," said the girl.

But Peter blew himself up and looked fierce. "I would kill them!" he said. At that time he had a passion for killing.

Old Rasmussen must tell more about Cadging Joe who was so terribly strong that his wooden clogs cracked, and so foolishly kind that he couldn't keep the flesh on his bones. When God had created

him he had put him down on earth. "There you are, you'll find both sunshine and shade," he said. But the devil had annexed the sunny side for himself and his. "We're living here," he said. So Cadging Joe had to settle in the shade; it was nice in the daytime but cold in the night.

"You must be cold!" cried the devil in the night. "I can hear your teeth chatter."

"You must be sweating!" Cadging Joe cried back when day came and the sun shone. "Mind you don't melt, you pot-belly!"—Then the devil made the winter, and Cadging Joe froze both day and night.

The Lord saw it and sent him a new overcoat and a warm quilt. And the devil was yellow and green with vexation. I could just do with those things, he thought, although he had no use for them whatever. And when he had thought about it for a while he had a brilliant idea, and so he invented the pawn-shop. That's the sort of a man he is!

And Cadging Joe is made in such a way that he can't pass a pawn-shop without wanting to pawn something; so there he keeps his coat and his quilt in winter. In summer, when the days are hot, he sports both quilt and coat—contrary as he's made. You'll always know Cadging Joe from the fact that he pawns his things when he needs them, and takes them out when they're no use to him.

"That's what mother does," said Peter.

"Well, if one were to go thoroughly into the matter, I daresay you're of the same family.—And

so they kept pulling at him, each at their own end, did God and the Devil. And God was the simplest of the two, so he couldn't keep up with the other one's foxy tricks. And Cadging Joe got into a state worse and worse."

"That's rubbish," said Peter, "for there is no God."

"Oh, yes there is—he is living in the Marble Church. If you want to be rich you've only got to pull his beard and spit in his face three times. But there aren't many people that dare to do that, so that's why there are so many poor in the world."

CHAPTER VII.

THE CONFIRMATION PARTY.

DITTE had had her best dress modernized with pleats and a new yoke, so as to be on the safe side. It cost a lot, but in case she were to be invited to Povl's confirmation she must be decently dressed. There would be a big to-do in Isted Street; she knew they had to use both the livingrooms and the bedroom to accommodate their guests. They had bought wine too, and songs had been printed; Sine knew how things ought to be done. Ditte had never in her life been to a real party; she had seen enough of festivities, but only as a servant; she looked forward to being among the guests herself. Her own confirmation had taken place in the poorest of circumstances, and it would be nice to feel herself sharing their prosperity. She was so anxious to go that on Saturday night she was on the point of putting her usual pride in her pocket and calling so as to remind them of her existence.

On Sunday morning she cried a little. Ditte did not easily give in, and Old Rasmussen scolded her soundly. "As if that was anything to be put out about, that bit of food—when one's health is the

most important thing after all. You be thankful you've got health and food enough for yourself and your kids. And likely as not they've only forgotten it because everything is topsy-turvy; they'll send round for you presently, no doubt." But they did not send round; Ditte went about with red eyes.

When she had put the children to bed she asked Old Rasmussen to look after them while she went for a walk. She put on her best dress and went through the town out to Isted Street. Outside her home she stopped suddenly, as if brought to her senses; she withdrew into the shadow on the opposite side of the street and stood looking at the blazing windows. There was light everywhere; the upper windows were open, smoke and loud voices and laughter poured out. The father's voice sounded above all others; he approached the window and stood talking into the room. When he ceased they all laughed. Ditte laughed too—she was sure he had said something kind and funny to Povl. Little Povl—if only she could take his head between her hands and kiss him and wish him luck and blessings—he was her boy after all! She had carried him until she was crooked, and she had sacrificed her nights to him—sobs welled up in her. But then they broke up, the street door opened and Else and her young man came out. They were quarrelling and sauntered along bareheaded, turning their backs on each other like two naughty children.

Ditte slipped out of the entrance where she had

been hiding and hurried round the corner. She drifted round willy-nilly, forsaken and soul-sick. She knew the father had missed her and felt it as an act of treachery that he had not insisted on her being invited. He had grown cowardly of late; he had never feared to resist Sörine's peculiarities where the children were concerned. But Sine had only to laugh as if she were being tickled, and he gave in at once. Sweet and plump and pleasant as she was she had smilingly separated Ditte from the only haven she had on earth—her home.

She walked along one of the little side streets into Fredriksberg Allé. The entrance to the Salvation Army premises was highly illuminated; *Week of great Rejoicing with Songs of Praise and Halleluja!* she read on the transparent canvas poster above the porch. Ditte drifted in; she felt thoroughly miserable and cold. She needed warmth and light both in soul and body.

It was gloriously warm and light in there! On the platform some male and female salvationists were performing; they sang and preached and played at once, as it were. In the midst of their singing they would break off with a snap and the mouth of one of them began clattering—and tjim! the orchestra suddenly rolled down on him and smothered him in ear-splitting noise. It gave one a shock every time, and tickled one to the root of one's hairs; one had to wake up! And the music thumped ahead, it literally thrashed the misery out

of one. Ditte did not take the speakers too seriously; they were only saying whatever came into their heads to make people good-tempered and to coax out a smile. It was nice to be in a place where she felt not merely welcome, but where the whole performance had, so to say, been got up for her sake!

She recognized several faces from the previous winter. And on one of the foremost forms she saw the old Ragpicker from the loft at home; he held his hat before his face and seemed lost in devotion. And leaning against one of the pillars by the window was—Hr. Kramer, the Congratulator! Ditte nearly cried out, she got such a fright when she saw him. His face was bluish-black, darker in color than she had ever seen it before;—he hadn't had any alcohol all day, then! His hands were folded across the hollow of his flabby stomach; beard, cheeks, his whole being somehow flopped. He looked sadly down and out; Ditte regretted having thought of turning him out. Where on earth could he go! She sat wondering how to get him home.

As she got up he took his hat from the window-sill. In the porch he came up with her. "Excuse my calling on foot," he said, "maybe we are going the same way? It isn't every night I can boast of a lady's company."

"Oh yes, let us go home, Hr. Kramer," said Ditte,

brightly. "I will buy some bread and we'll have a cup of coffee."

"Home," he drawled the word out—"Family life and napkins round the stove and coffee and fancy bread, eh? Not for me, thank you, little Fru Hansen; the bosom of the family is securely locked up, I can assure you. But there is a beautiful cellar round here in Vesterbro Market; you come along with me—ladies frequent the place!"

No, thanks, Ditte did not go to cafés.

"Oh well,—you are really too nice for that. But —eh, you might lend me a krone or two."

"I have no money, Hr. Kramer," said Ditte, looking him in the eyes. "Not a single copper."

"But you said you would buy some bread. Can't you give me the money and save the bread?" He seized her by the sleeve and looked at her beseechingly. It was as if a hope of heavenly salvation lit up his dull eyes.

"I meant to buy on credit," said Ditte—"I can have credit at the baker's. And if you like I will try to get a drop of brandy for your coffee instead of bread."

He shrugged his shoulders. "You know I never drink at home in the den—I am not a habitual drunkard. But why the devil—well, excuse my calling on foot—but if you have credit, couldn't you be a good girl and raise a couple of kroner? You shall have them back tomorrow, as sure as I have been a decent man once." They were standing at the Mar-

ket and Kramer's eyes and ears were glued to the cellar—he literally sucked in the noise from the entrance. "Do be a good girl!" he implored—"two measly kroner!"

Ditte would have done it willingly; she pitied him heartily, standing there staring sickly at his beloved tavern. "But I don't know at all where to get them," she said despairingly.

The tenderness in her voice made him press harder. "Where to get them—where to get them!" he said. "Do you mean to tell me that if you had a child lying ill, needing a doctor and medicines, you wouldn't know how to get them? There are many ways of getting them. If I were you I should easily raise a score of kroner in less than a quarter of an hour."

"How could I do that?" asked Ditte in surprise.

He put his hand on her shoulder intimately and bent towards her: "Handsome as you are," he said pointing towards the street where men hovered to and fro in the lamp-light like night-moths.

Ditte looked at him petrified. Then she turned and walked away, crying softly.

When she got home Karl had just left. The children were still awake, they were quite excited. He had brought his supper because it was so boring sitting munching alone at home; they had had a meal, with coffee and buns to follow. "And we had both cheese and meat sandwiches," the children related at the same time. "How kind he is," said Old Ras-

mussen—"and so steady and serious-minded. He'd never waste a copper of his earnings on drink. That's the kind of man I should have liked for a husband."

Ditte did not reply. She was tired—and sick of it all.

Ditte was to have her share in the feast after all, for next morning Lars Peter came round with a basket full of tit-bits, roast meat, cakes, and many other good things. "You must excuse us for not asking you," said he. "We were only ourselves and a few neighbors. And in her present condition mother must not be saddled with too much."

He did not look at Ditte as he spoke, and she did not find it necessary to reply. She did not take the basket; he had to put it down himself by the stove. Neither did she thank him, she ignored the basket altogether. "Well, I'd better be off—I'm out with the horse," he said taking her hand; his eyes looked sad. The children were with Old Rasmussen; he did not ask for them.

Ditte put on her clothes, she went to work at one o'clock today. Before she went she took the basket across to Old Rasmussen. "Couldn't you get hold of a boy to run out to Isted Street with this," she said. "It's something father brought—from the confirmation; but I won't touch their leavings."

"Of course not, I should say so, too," said the old woman. "Yes, I'll get Olsen's Kresjan to take it

—let 'em have it back right slap in the face; serves 'em right."

When Ditte had gone the old woman opened the basket. "Oh what delicious things,—just look, dearies!" she cried, clapping her hands together. "It would be a sin and a shame to give all that back to those stuck-up pigs. Supposing we eat it ourselves—but then you mustn't breathe a word to your mammy!"

Oh no, the children knew how to keep their mouths shut; they were used to having secrets with Old Rasmussen. So they gorged themselves and it did taste glorious; she knew how to cook, did that stuck-up female in Isted Street! There was sufficient for several days; it was a beastly shame Ditte couldn't have a taste!

CHAPTER VIII.

OLD RASMUSSEN GETS NEW BOOTS.

TO be working was both a good and a bad thing. Ditte must thank God there were so much people wanting her for charring and washing. In that way she had her food and a weekly sum, however modest. In several places she was given food which she brought home to Old Rasmussen and the children. The mistresses gave it her for those at home—or the maids filched it for her.

But the children, for whose sake she did it, suffered through it. They got their food—but in other ways they were neglected. Old Rasmussen was kind enough, but she did not know how to bring them up. They had no respect for her, and did what they liked. Ditte would rather not have them playing in the yard; it was a dirty place, and many undesirable things stuck—not merely to their clothes, but to their minds as well. She had forbidden it, but she knew from their clothes and from themselves that they went down nevertheless; Old Rasmussen let them sneak down and told them not to mention it. That was the worst of it all, for in that way they would learn to lie and keep things to themselves.

Ditte promptly raised the prohibition, rather than that they should disobey her behind her back. But the result was extra work on Sundays; she had already the whole week's homework, and now she must cleanse the children from all kinds of filth that had accumulated both outside and inside all through the week. It was a fag, so much more as she was unfamiliar with their daily life. It was like tending a garden which grew over between each time she weeded it; if she could only nip the weeds as soon as they appeared! As things were she easily lost patience with them.

When she had finished and sat listening to their chatter the wounds in her heart would soon open and begin to bleed. She felt she did not treat them as she ought to; she had not the strength—she had no strength for anything. Everything revolved round the children; she lived and toiled so that they might have a good time—might have enough to eat and be happy and grow up into decent beings. And when they made a mess, spilled their food or dirtied themselves, she would flare up and be unreasonable. She knew well enough she could expect nothing else from little children—but she forgot it at the moment. Afterwards, when she had scolded and fussed and made them cry, then she was wise and forbearing—when it was too late! And next time the same thing would happen. She thought of Granny's patience with herself—she did not possess that! But then Granny had not got to earn the food for a

whole flock. She could look after Ditte always—that made all the difference.

Ditte would try home-work once more. It did not answer when first she tried it, but never mind—she would learn a special trade this time, learn how to make one special article. She would be paid more, and it was surer work. There was a collar maker, Fröken* Jensen in Mother Geismar's buildings; she had always a couple of apprentices. Ditte could hear the machines humming over there early and late. She was engaged to a policeman and was busy getting a home together—that was why she struggled so hard. When they were married he would retire from the police force and apply for a position as an agent for a big block of buildings—ex-policemen had preference when such vacancies occurred. And she would open a real business.

Ditte had spoken to her about apprenticeship—a course of two weeks cost 15 kroner. Afterwards she could work for her for wages. Ditte could manage all right if only she could find the money for the course. And the money was owing to her.

She sat up until the Congratulator returned; she preferred to see him in the evening, he was more considerate and sensible then. It was long past midnight when at last she heard his faltering steps on the stairs. She opened the door to the passage. "Hr. Kramer, may I speak to you for a moment," she said.

*Fröken—Miss.

He came in, blinking at the light, breathing hard. Pooh, those damned stairs.

Ditte explained the position. "If only you could find one month's rent," she said. "Then I could pay the course. We could surely find the food somehow for that fortnight."

"The food, oh yes, one can always find the food —some strange how," he replied with a large gesture of the hand. "Don't you get any grey hairs on that score! But tell me, little Fru Hansen, what do you really take me for? Do you think the Congratulator has suddenly become a millionaire?"

"Oh no, I have no illusions," laughed Ditte in despair. "But one must pay one's rent, after all! Or do you expect the children to suffer because you tipple away what is really theirs?"

"Stop! You must not say that!" he cried, terrified, putting out his hands as if to ward off a blow. "I am sorry you should put it in that way, we must leave the little innocents out of it." He stood swallowing, looking for something to lean against; he was quite shaken. "Well, excuse my calling on foot," he said thickly, "but I am exceedingly sorry that you should put it in that tragic manner. The little ones—ugh, it's damned rotten!" He tumbled into his own room. "Damned rotten!" she heard him repeat.

Then he came out again and stood looking at her with moist eyes. "I'm a swine," he said, "and you're a good little woman. Oh yes you are—no

need to protest! And what do you get out of it? The Congratulator cheats you, the kids' parents cheat you, and you've not the heart to turn us out. She won't turn you out! I often tell myself—you go and spend your money on something better! You may as well admit it, Mother Ditte, you'll never turn me out. And if I'm taken ill tomorrow and can't get up you'll cook gruel for me—even if you had to get both water and oats on credit. That's what I call a brick—Providence pure and simple. Lord God on high, if one hadn't done with women already, what a wife you'd have made! But not for me, thank you—it's outside the scope of the Congratulator! Don't you get ideas of that sort. I tell you; you'll waste your powder. Unhappy love —nothing doing!"

Ditte laughed: "What did you want to tell me, Hr. Kramer?"

"Ah, what did I want to say?—first that I'm a swine. Yes—and then about the money! The Congratulator was rather shabby the other night—wanted you to get some money in a beastly way, eh? —we won't speak about that again, will we? But Kramer'll do a dirty thing for you in return; the very day tomorrow we'll do a downright caddish trick for Mother Ditte's sake—for by God she deserves it. We'll go to Oster Allé and congratulate her ladyship on the anniversary of her wedding day —so we will."

Ditte flew up in alarm: "Hr. Kramer—you don't

mean to go begging to your divorced wife? I won't have it, do you hear? You must never do such a thing." The Congratulator leered, he thoroughly enjoyed her dismay.

"That is just what I mean to do. Not begging, of course—a visit of congratulation, do you see—lovely bouquet—the husband. My compliments to your virtuous wife, angelic disposition—knew her before you met her! The devil take me if that isn't worth fifteen to twenty kroner. Well, good night, my dear! Now we'll go and sleep the sleep of the comparatively decent; and tomorrow we walk on all fours. Damned rotten!"

Next day at dinner-time Kramer came in, flinging down fifteen kroner. "There!" he said, looking venomously at her, his eyes green with hatred; then he walked out. Ditte understood what it must have cost him to do such a thing, heartily as he hated all his acquaintances from better days. He had dragged himself through the mire to help her out of the hole; not even his beloved brandy could have made him do that. How good of him!

Ditte went to the work-room every day; she could count the days after which she would be able to stay at home with her babies. Only the chief thing was lacking—the sewing-machine.

"You ought to go to the baker's man," said Old Rasmussen. "He lends money on interest—he is quite reliable." But for some reason or other Ditte

did not want to apply to Læborg; she preferred to go to strangers.

After dinner she went out, and an hour later she returned, with hot cheeks. She had been to a shop where they sold machines on the hire-purchase system without a sum down, simply on weekly instalments. "I've got such a lovely machine, mother," she said delighted, "the best in the whole shop. They could let me have an inferior one, they said, that would pay them better; but they didn't feel it was right to do it. Wasn't that nice? I shall have it for 200 kroner, paying four kroner a week, and after a year it is mine. That includes interest—it costs 150 kroner cash. Don't you think it is a bargain?"

"Yes, if it's worth more," said the old woman drily. She was not pleased.

The same afternoon the machine arrived. It was not quite new; in fact, it was not the one Ditte had looked at. But it was nice, and it worked well—and it was there. The seamstress came over to try it, and it was consecrated by a cup of coffee. The important thing now was to see that the weekly four kroner were on hand; that would not be difficult, as long as there was work to be had. Ditte looked forward with confidence.

She worked at home now, and she got collars by the dozen to finish off. She already earned a krone a day, beside looking after her home. Of course she could not live on that for any length of time, but

she would soon be able to take in work directly for the shop. Fröken Jensen had promised to introduce her to the manager and to recommend her as soon as she was efficient enough.

Old Rasmussen shuffled about in a state of depression; she mostly kept to herself. And one day when Ditte came across her unawares she sat by her little table and cried. It was that sewing-machine! "Now a poor old devil is of no use whatever in this world," she sniffled. "And the children that I had grown so fond of."

"But mother—how can you get such ideas into your head!" Ditte was on the verge of tears. "You really must continue to help me—how can I get on otherwise? And when I get going on my own you must help me with the collars as well; they have to be tacked together—and so on." So the old woman was happy again, and followed the children when they came to fetch her for meals. The last days she had kept to herself—she didn't want to be a burden.

"If I could only get a new pair of boots out of the Relief Officer I could fetch and deliver the work for you; that would be a great saving of time." There were no soles to the boots she had on.

"Let's try," said Ditte. "They can only say no. They can't eat you!"

"Oh can't they? You take it from me, they can

both eat and digest you. You thank God you haven't got anything to do with the Guardians."

"Never mind," said Ditte. "You just stiffen your back and stick to your rights. They *must* get boots for old folks."

"Ah well, it's easy for you to sit here talking about stiffening one's back; you'd speak differently if you had to see them yourself. First one has to stand there waiting for hours until one's poor old legs are quite ruined; then he suddenly rushes out from the inner office, does that devilish District Officer, and puts his fore paws on the counter and barks right in your face."

The old woman was trembling at the thought of going to the District Office. Ditte had to go with her next morning to make sure she didn't shirk it and come back telling she had been there; she was quite like a child. It was afternoon before she returned; during the whole time she had had to stand outside the counter together with some other old people, and she was quite done up. Ditte helped her off with the coat and her old boots, and poured out a cup of hot coffee for her; her feet were soaking wet. Ditte talked about all sorts of things to put the old woman in a good temper again. "Well, how did you fare?" she asked at length.

"Heh! They properly bullied me—that's how I fared. The Inspector wasn't there himself; but those young whelps can bark, too. I had new boots last year, they said—they couldn't have me running

begging new boots every minute. Perhaps I danced them to pieces? Then when I showed them the state of my foot-gear, they offered me a pair of wooden clogs. If I wasn't satisfied with that they'd send me back to my deceased huband's district. Jolly hard, I call it. I've been living here for forty years, toiling for other people; and now, when I can work no longer, they threaten to send me away to a place where I don't know a living soul." The old woman cried. "And my poor feet are nothing but bunions; how on earth can I wear wooden shoes?"

"We'll find a way out," said Ditte, kissing her cheeks which were wet with tears—"there, mother, there! On Saturday I shall have some money from Anna's father, I know for sure! Then we'll buy boots—we'll buy dancing slippers, mother!" She looked the old woman smilingly in the eyes.

"You are kind enough, I know—but where'll you take it all from? There are ten holes yawning for every coin." Suddenly she laughed again. "Dancing slippers, aye—the whelps! Poking fun at a woman of seventy-nine."

In the afternoon Mother Geismar looked in to see Ditte's machine and take a cup of coffee; she was told the story of the District Office. "That's the sort they are," she said. "And at the Magistrate's there's nothing but cowards, they're much more frightened of the District Officer than we are, although they're his bosses. But you go to church in

your wooden shoes, Madam Rasmussen. They don't like that, for God's house is God's house after all. Then you'll see them finding you a pair of leather boots. But mind you stamp the church floor well."

Madam Rasmussen did that; she was not nearly as frightened of God and the parson as she was of the Inspector. The parson himself came up to her after the service. He stood with his hand on her shoulder and spoke kindly to her in front of the whole congregation. And next day Old Rasmussen had a pair of beautiful warm boots. The wooden shoes Mother Geismar had taken as pay for her help; they could always be turned into money.

Existence here was no easier than at the Hamlet: from hand to mouth—and scarcely that. Out there it was possible to see where the result of one's toil went to; the hand that emptied the hive always left a little so that the bees did not die of starvation. But the hand that swept the table clean in here was invisible; as far as that went it might just as well be God's as the devil's. It was the hand of fate, anyhow, for there did not seem to be any way out. Ditte started at the beginning once more, but she had no great faith. There were many people to compare herself with; the blocks of buildings contained families and single persons by the hundreds—a whole little town lived there. But if one left out the front building—which one obviously must do—

there was not much difference. There was, in fact, no essential difference in the conditions of those that drank and wasted, and those that led decent lives; there was just as much—or just as little—left over. For themselves, at any rate!

Existence did not always look rosy in the front building either. The bakers toiled and moiled and never got any further. The wife attended to the shop herself, and Nielsen struggled on with the help of one apprentice, and that reliable Jutlander Læborg; they were all industrious and conscientious, and the shop had many customers. Neither did they give too much for the money—that was quite sure. The French loaves and seed-bread were full of big holes—the abode of Nielsen's soul, Old Rasmussen used to say. But for all that there were frequent rumors that they were on the point of bankruptcy.

Ditte could not get the hang of the whole affair. When she had been speaking to Karl she tried to find a meaning, puzzling her brains in an attempt to get behind appearances; but she soon gave it up. There was too much to fight against from day to day for one to begin to speculate about the future; sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. It was a big enough strain to keep oneself and one's own world afloat; as to where it was drifting to—that fate must decide. It was difficult enough to keep afloat where so much went to the bottom.

Ditte was not on intimate terms with the other

women in the building; she kept to herself. That was the wisest course—one might so easily be dragged into something unpleasant; there was frequently trouble in the buildings. They said she was stuck-up, but never mind that—as long as nobody got a chance to poke their nose into her affairs. She had long enough been a pariah and did not object to being the daughter of the furniture dealer in Isted Street; the rag-and-bone man and the Crow's-Nest and Sörine's crime might as well remain in eternal darkness.

For the police she nourished a constant inner dread. If they found an opportunity to dig up her past they would be sure to take the children away from her. She was always nervous when the police had occasion to visit the buildings.

And that happened not seldom. In the night there was often trouble in the yard, or in one of the flats; then they had to fetch the police. Sometimes they called without being summoned, and the constables behaved quite differently here to what they did in the fashionable quarters where she had been a servant. Here they never touched the rim of their helmet with a white-gloved hand! They always kept their hand in the back pocket—where the truncheon was; and if there was no trouble in the street maybe they would make it. They probably felt bored!

One night she woke up frightened by shouts and hammering in the yard. She rushed to the window. Outside laborer Andersen's flat some dark figures

were standing, hammering at the door; from their heavy ulstered forms she discerned that they were policemen. "Open the door!" they called—"it's the police. You owe a school-fine of 80 öre; Selma must do time for it!"

"Can't you take me?" asked a sleepy male voice.

"No—you aren't properly married; we want the mother. But hurry up; there's a car waiting outside!"

"I'm ill!" Selma's voice sounded really bad. "You shall have the money tomorrow."

"Oh yes, we know all about that! Where's the hurt—did the boil bust? We'd better come and see for ourselves."

They tried to unlock the door, one could hear them rattling a bunch of keys. "We shall stay until you open," one of them said.

The inhabitants hung out of the windows, they scolded and made jokes about the coppers. "Get out of it, you dirty dogs!" a creaky voice close to Ditte called out—"or I'll drop a brick on your head!" It was the Congratulator; he hung across the window-sill waving his arms threateningly. At length they went away.

Next morning Selma canvassed the inhabitants to borrow money to pay the school fine; she got a five-öre from Ditte. The children's father was ill. He had an accident on the steamer where he was unloading coal—a quarter of a ton had dropped on his back. He had been in bed for six weeks with-

out any income, so the kiddies had to shirk school in order to earn something. But Selma had done them brown; everybody felt proud that the police had to slink off empty-handed.

CHAPTER IX.

ALL SORTS.

KARL looked in every day; there was no reason why he shouldn't, as there was hardly any work to be had. The public work on the roads had already been stopped. "The big men at the Council have probably got the gout," he said with a sneer—"and so they think the soil must be frozen!"

"Well, how are you getting on?" That was always his first question; he was as interested in the machine as was Ditte herself.

"I'm doing very well, thank you!" she replied every time.

That was not quite true. She herself thought she was progressing; she was already as smart in her work as the older seamstresses, though she was somewhat slower. But her apprenticeship—the last part of it—would never come to an end; she was kept on working for Fröken Jensen for a krone a day. Every time she reminded the seamstress of her promise to introduce her to the manager of the shop, Fröken Jensen replied: "You are not quite good enough for that yet—we shall see presently."

It was all very well, but Ditte must earn some money now; "tomorrow" killed the farrier's cat! She could not continue to live on six kroner a week, especially as the machine took four. Fortunately the Collector was a lenient fellow. If he arrived on the Saturday and she had no money, he didn't bite her head off—as long as she didn't let it run on too far. "You must get eight kroner for me next Saturday then," he said—"otherwise I shall have to take the machine back." But it never got so far, Ditte was never more than a week behind.

But it was often difficult—she needed someone to advise her. And still she repeated her Thank you, I'm doing very well! Whether it was that she felt ashamed to confess that she wasn't doing well, or she was unable to surrender to Karl's sympathy and help—the invisible chalk-line was still there and she could not cross it, chicken-headed fool as she was!

And she could confide in no one else—not even in Lars Peter. Too long—ever since her earliest childhood—she had been accustomed to face her own difficulties and take responsibility upon herself; it was difficult to accept advice and help now. She could not make herself turn to any human being; when things looked blackest she shut herself off from her surroundings.

But Karl discovered by himself that there was something wrong, and one evening he asked her straight out. "She is a real sweater," he said when with much trouble he had got the truth out of her.

"She is sitting there making money on you—that's the whole secret. Maybe she has others besides!"

Ditte would not believe that this was the case. "She is of a poor family herself," she said.

"Well, what about that? Would that prevent her from fleecing others? When it comes to the point everybody is born poor!"

Ditte did not quite see what he was driving at; there were certainly both rich and poor in the world.

"But man was born naked into the world!"

"Yes, of course—in that sense!" Ditte faltered; she feared he might begin his religious contemplations again. "She is a beauty!" he cried suddenly. "And there she goes looking down on us and doing the lady. She is going to marry a policeman and open her own shop. And the others must stump up the capital! I like that!"

"Tomorrow you'll go straight to the shop and ask for work," said Karl. "Or perhaps you'd better try another—she may put a spoke in your wheel there. Pushers are not very considerate."

The children were in bed long ago and slept soundly. Suddenly Peter raised his head. "I dreamt it was you," he said—his eyes beamed. Then he fell back again and slept on. Little Georg also woke up. "Da-a, da-a!" he cried.

"I do believe he's already trying to say mammy—that is well done for a seven-month babe," said Karl.

"No, he is trying to say daddy," Ditte explained seriously. "He's too small yet to understand that he has got no daddy."

Karl looked at her silently. The expression in his eyes made her serious and silent; suddenly, as he sat playing with Baby Brother, he discovered she was crying.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know—everything is so strange. I somehow don't understand anything."

"Everything will come right—if you only wait a little," he replied. The kindness in his voice made her sob loudly.

"Why haven't you insisted on your rights?" she broke out suddenly and violently. "Then there'd have been an end to it! Why do you go there waiting for me to come to you? You are the man, surely!"

Karl shook his head: "I broke your will once—and dearly I have had to pay, believe me. Each must act according to his own free will!"

"So you say. But if a man wants something, and cannot make himself say Yes for all that? If only somebody would take me by the scruff of the neck occasionally and say: *You shall!*"

"You will never make me do that!" said Karl and got up. "I hope I shall never again see the day when I use force towards anybody. Well, I must go, there is a meeting at the *Chain*. It's the unemployed!" He held out his hand.

"You aren't afraid of speaking about force and violence when you are there!" Ditte held on to his hand. It was as if she cleaved to him.

"That is another question! Every man has a right to his food—if it means taking it himself!" said Karl firmly.

Ditte sat thinking until she forgot her work. She was sorry for what she had said, and sorry for something she had not said—and would probably never be able to make herself say. If only Karl had needed her, then it would have been easy to follow her inmost desire and take him to her bosom. But the opposite was the case; she needed someone to share her burden—that was the difficulty. Why, then, did he not come to her when she was the needy one? Why must the needy always go begging? Ditte had always spared others from this and tried to guess their need, for she knew how difficult it was to ask. Why did he not fold her in his strength and subject her to his will? Was it out of consideration for her—did he believe that another was still living in her heart?

In the beginning Ditte lived entirely in memories of Georg. It was as if he was merely out on a spree and might walk in at any moment; the fact that it was never proved whether he had really perished or what had become of him probably contributed to this feeling. Ditte did not actually sorrow for him, she thought lovingly of him during her work. She had forgotten the trouble he gave and

thought of him only as the man whose kindness was without limits—and who needed her. A great child!

Gradually it dawned on her that he was gone beyond recall; and one day she also realized that it was better so. The fight for existence was bitter enough; it would have been still worse if she had had to look after him as well. When his child lay no longer under her heart an entire change took place in her with regard to Karl. He occupied her thoughts more and more; if he did not appear at the usual time she waited anxiously. He was strong, and she admired him; it would be good to unload her responsibilities and yield to him. Being fond of him, why was it she could not show him any warmth of feelings—of that kind? Was it because there had been too much between them? Ditte did not know, but that there was an obstacle, something preventing her from tenderly giving in to him—that she did know. But why did he not help her over it—lead her with a strong hand—take her? Ditte asked herself occasionally whether he was a real man!

Karl was right. Fröken Jensen had been a downright sweater; working for a wholesale firm directly, Ditte could now earn a good daily wage if only there was work enough to be had in the trade. But bad times forced many of the workers to save the collar and let the shirt serve alone on week-days; she could not manage quite without outside work.

Fortunately she had not given up some of the better places. But most week-days she spent at home with the children, tending and watching them. They badly needed it; she now discovered how much they had been neglected.

One day, when she returned from work a little earlier than usual, little Anna had run away. That had happened before, without her getting to know about it; Peter and Old Rasmussen caught the girl in time. Ditte was much upset, she pulled off her apron and rushed out, ran round the whole quarter, questioning all the children she met. Something might have happened—some accident; she could not bear to think of it. In the best of cases, if the girl was safe she would be brought to the police station! That thought made Ditte groan with pain; she had to stop to catch her breath, her hand pressed against her heart where the pain was maddening. If the police got to know about her little nest they would pull it down. They would not have it, she had no license to take in children! Weeping, she returned to the building, hoping that the child might have come back; Peter and the old woman were sitting by the window looking down. She could see that Anna had not returned.

So she had to go to the police; there was nothing for it—she herself must lay her head on the block! She went up to change her dress.

"Sister ran away the other day, too," said Peter. "But I got hold of her then."

The old woman made signs to him. "What—has she been away before?" exclaimed Ditte.

"Yes—I found her far down Adel Street. She said she wanted to go to Granny."

It did not take Ditte many minutes to get down again and out to Nyboder, where lived an old relative of laborer Svendsen, a woman who was the widow of a pilot and lived on her old age pension. She was over eighty and spent most of her time in bed; the child had visited her a few times with her father.

It was incredible that the girl should still remember her; that she should be able to find her way out there sounded like sheer madness. But she was there nevertheless, and the old woman was just on the point of sending a boy back with her.

"You gave me such a fright, child," said Ditte on their way home. "I have got quite a pain in my heart." She walked with her arm pressed against her chest to ease the pain. When they got home the little girl would get a regular smacking! And Old Rasmussen would get a sound talking to—keeping secrets like that and making the children hide the truth from their mother! Ditte was very angry.

But the return journey took a long time, she felt so poorly after her fright and the running; when she reached home her anger had evaporated. She was glad of that; otherwise she might have forgotten herself—and regretted it afterwards. She

had escaped with a fright this time! Old Rasmussen was a decent old sort and did her best, it was simply that she was incapable. And the kid—well, how often had she herself run away when she was a child—to her Granny! And she would have got her thrashing for it—if Lars Peter had not been there shielding her and preventing it.

Lars Peter—how kind and patient he had been! —he had always buffered off the blow from her. And how had she rewarded him? She had paid him back evil for good, that was what she had done! Ditte was suddenly seized by regret; fright and anger and relief were suddenly turned into a bad conscience and an urge to reconciliation. She was so grateful for having got Sister back without further calamity that she willingly took the whole blame upon herself—she felt a longing to show her appreciation of someone or other. And as Sine was the only person in the world she felt slighted by, it was to her Ditte apologized. What wrong was there in trying to push upwards? She was a capable woman who looked after her home and was a good wife to Lars Peter in every way. Ditte was envious—that was all!

When the children were in bed she went home. They were sitting round the supper table when she arrived, and there was an awkward feeling in the room. Else and her sweetheart were squabbling as usual; they were a couple of silly children, they could neither agree nor be apart from each other. Else

had danced too long with somebody else the previous evening, and Hjalmar was offended in consequence. "He was holding your hand afterwards—I saw that right enough!" he said glumly.

"You just shut up, you have nothing to reproach me with," replied Else. "You were kissing Mary on the neck when you put the stole round her—don't you think I didn't see it!" So it went on until Else went into the kitchen and cried.

"You are a pair of beauties!" said Lars Peter looking from one to the other; he could not keep them in order. Sine said nothing.

But soon after they were friends again and went out together. They were going to the theatre.

"Ah, it's a real treat to have two minutes' peace," said Lars Peter when they were well outside. "One can take life easy now." He pulled the armchair up to the lamp and sat down reading the newspaper. The son-in-law to be always occupied that chair when he was there.

"Why do you have him hanging about here always?" asked Ditte.

Well—he had nowhere else to go; and the two couldn't live apart from each other. He did not earn much, and they were obliged to ask him to share their meals, otherwise he might starve.

"Hadn't you better ask him to stay here altogether?" said Ditte somewhat ironically.

"We have been talking about it, mother and I," said Lars Peter seriously. "But if it doesn't last

between them it would be better not to be too thick, of course."

Ditte had her own thoughts about these matters. But who was she, to air her thoughts here? So she said nothing.

She felt in various ways that they were not happy. "Is business doing badly?" she asked.

"Oh there isn't much in it altogether," replied Lars Peter. "The people we have to live on can't afford to buy anything."

"Father buys too dear—and sells too cheap," Sine shoved in.

"One can't very well live on other people's misery —that is what's the matter," said Lars Peter. "It is none too easy when they come running here with their poor bits of things—a blanket or something that I know they need badly in the cold weather. One can scarcely make oneself buy it from them, anything about beating them down and taking advantage of their need!"

"No, father has often let them keep their things and lent them money—when he knew that they could badly do without the thing they wanted to sell."

"Yes, and then they crossed the road and sold it to my opponent—and there I was. It's none too easy."

Sine laughed: "No, not in that way."

"Well, you don't mean to say we ought to fleece poor folk?"

No, Sine didn't mean that—"But I do mean that one can't both blow and keep the flour in one's

mouth! Those with the hard grip are flourishing, and we are going to the dogs—do you think poor folk are better served in that way?"

"No, it isn't easy—we want to exist ourselves. But a rotten thing it is to live on the misery of others —and that's what the secondhand dealer must do." Lars Peter was thoroughly put out about it.

But then Sine went to the bedroom and fetched the baby who had wakened, and that put him in a good mood again. Sine was in the family way again; there was something in this continual getting of children that made Ditte feel awkward, she did not know why. For all that it was good to see how young and fresh Lars Peter became as soon as he got a kiddie between his hands. He flung the baby up in the air and rumbled with delight. And the kid tore at his wreath of hair, wetted his big moon all over with its mouth, and shrieked with joy. This was how Ditte remembered him from the time she was a child herself—noisy and happy; and the little ones always were mad for his company. And before her time, long ago, he had prattled and romped with another flock of children that had mysteriously passed out of his existence—she never knew how.

Lars Peter was unfading!

CHAPTER X.

THE CONGRATULATOR STRIKES HIS FLAG.

HR. KRAMER had been queer of late. He no longer went out tippling, but came home early and crept to bed—whatever the reason might be. There were days when he did not get up at all but lay moping with the quilt pulled right up over his nose. His room was cold, and his blood could hardly keep him warm. "It is too blue," he said, "I am of an old family! You have only to look at my nose." Ditte brought him the paper, but he did not care to read.

Of course he was of good family; but that was not of much use when they let him go to the dogs. Old Rasmussen was right, one did well in wishing for as few relatives as possible.

One day Beard of Hearts dragged him home; he had had a stroke at Kongens Nytorv and could scarcely keep on his feet. The idiot happened to be near and gave him a hand, which was fortunate; otherwise the police would surely have sent him to the Infirmary—he was so bad. He shivered like a sick dog when they got him into bed. "He doesn't

get enough brandy," whispered Beard of Hearts. And though it was an idiot that said it, Ditte felt inclined to agree.

So there he lay, as he had prophesied when he was fuddled; Ditte could take to cooking gruel now. "Turn 'im out!" said the women, "you can't support a grown man—sot that he is! If it's 'plexy he may hang on for twenty years! Let the police take 'im to the hospital."

But Ditte had not the heart to do that. He was her lodger, and that settled it. Maybe he was responsible for his condition—a downright rotten life he had led, hanging round taverns and never getting food at the proper time. But Ditte was not one to ask who was to blame—that *would* be a task, digging about to find the cause of the calamity. He was in need; that was sufficient for her.

It was not quite clear what really was the matter. Karl knew a doctor who was on the side of the malcontent workers, and who would not ask a fee if they sent for him. But the Congratulator would not hear of it. He didn't care, and lay there making fun of his condition. "You know yourself what is the matter with me," he said spitefully. "The idiot whispered it to you. Isn't that sufficient, when the idiot himself said so?"

Another day he knocked on the wall, and looked very solemn when Ditte came in. "Honestly—would you really care to know what ails me?" he said seriously. Then I will tell you—it is

blood-poisoning, malignant blood-poisoning. I got it when I stood face to face with her ladyship—my quondam wife, I mean. Hanged if I could stick that."

Ditte must see that he got something to eat, otherwise he would die of starvation. "Well, how are you, Hr. Kramer, are you getting up today?" she asked in the morning when she brought his coffee.

"I don't know. May I ask you why I should get up?"

"To earn some money—and get a little fresh air. You will be fading away."

"Well, and what then? That won't hurt anybody!"

Later in the day she brought him something hot—whatever she could find.

"What the devil are you up to? You keep your food and leave me alone!" he always said. "I won't have your charity-soup."

"But you take the morning coffee," said Ditte pointedly.

"Surely that is another matter—that is included in the rent," he replied in vexation. Certainly that was so, but as he didn't pay the rent it came to the same thing. So Ditte went out and left the food, and when she came in again towards evening he had eaten it. He was lying there looking vicious with suppressed rage.

"You are crowing now, eh?" he said. "I can see from your eyes how you gloat. Women are never

happier than when they have their own way, even if they suffer in consequence. Do you know what you ought to do, Fru Hansen? You ought to turn me out. Your rent you'll never get out of me—not if I become a millionaire. See?"

"You don't mean that at all—you are not as bad as that. You're only pretending to be wicked. In reality——"

"Well—in reality?" he raised his head. "Well, what?" he snapped.

"Oh, nothing!" Ditte shut her mouth firmly; now *she* was in a teasing mood.

"Nothing was it? I'll tell you what you meant. That I am in reality a good honest soul. But you are on the wrong track there; otherwise I shouldn't be lying here now. They don't let the good honest souls go under—they use them. But you are of the foolishly kind sort, that is why I can't stand you. Foolishly kind people ought to be skinned."

"And so they are, without your assistance," said Ditte slamming the door behind her.

"I mean alive—I want them skinned alive!" he shouted after her. Ditte heard it but pretended that she didn't.

Thus he lay twaddling. It was difficult to say whether he was really ill or merely full of gall.

"How is it—you believe in justice, don't you, Fru Hansen?" he said one morning when Ditte came in.

"I don't know—perhaps I do," replied Ditte.

"Oh yes you do—we need not walk on our hind

legs for each other! At any rate, you believe in being just—you believe in compassion, the devil take me if you don't! One should be kind to those in need, eh? Poor fallen individuals like the Congratulator? Preferably people that have seen better days—how pathetic! But do you know what it is? I have thought it out last night, and it is all rot and rubbish. For what does it mean that a man has come down in the world? If I sell my conscience to the devil and get a good price for it, nobody will say I have come down. But if I resist the temptation and keep my pig-sty clean, and take the consequences—then I'm going down-hill, then I am a failure. Is it any wonder a man takes to drink? Take your own case. You are a ninny in many ways, but your heart is in the right place; you are the most decent woman in these buildings—yes you are! But you scrub the stairs, which is not 'the thing,' not even in a den like this. And what is the result—that they don't call you Frue but Stairwoman; the shabbiest female in the block thinks she has a right to look down on you—you are the Stairwoman, so there! Is it any wonder a man takes to drink? People are infamous scoundrels, that's what they are."

"Some of them probably are," Ditte agreed.

"They all are, that is the sad thing. And if I had only discovered it a few years sooner I shouldn't be lying here now sweating gin and gall. But the god or devil that created Kramer made him an optimist,

don't you see—the kind of ass that goes about believing in what is good. There was the responsibility as a higher being, as a man created in God's image—I had high ideals. The devil only knows where I had them from—my environment certainly did not create them. On the contrary, I was slightly outside—the young man of ideals, they called me. Due respect for noble thoughts, by all means—as long as it did not lead one to do anything foolish. They expected me, so to say, to do something foolish from time to time.

"But all went well in spite of the ideals, I passed my examinations, obtained a good position, married an heiress, had a beautiful home—in spite of the ideals, as I said. They had met with no great trial, do you see. My acquaintances were highly impressed—that the two should be compatible! Then it was an easy matter to keep ideals. Rightly seen they might even be said to be an ornament—one might apply oneself to the cultivation of a few. Have you ever seen a pig with gold-fillings in its teeth? I have. Is it a wonder, then, that a man takes to drink?

"Well, one day the trial came; it was occasioned by the arrival of a telegram. The speculator on a big scale, who had started the enormous Telegraph Company, thought he had the first right to peep at the telegrams—at those for his rivals as well. That was the real reason why he had launched the Company—not to serve his country as a good patriot, as

it is so beautifully called. But his chief man said No: the secrecy of telegrams must not be violated, he maintained."

"But that was only right!" exclaimed Ditte. "There was nothing foolishly kind in that."

"Quite right—of an idiot! As if it mattered a hang to me whether the dogs ate the swine or the swine ate the dogs. Lord God on high what a fool I was. I was quite clear over what it would cost, of course; I felt quite the hero when I was thrown out, a martyr in the cause of justice. And I applied for a new position quite blown up with good conscience; naturally they would receive the hero with open arms! But not a bit of it, the door was shut! The genius of a financier had long arms—nobody dared to take in the hero. Even the rival—the man that was to be knocked out by the aid of his own stock-exchange telegrams—shrugged his shoulders. We-ell, he knew these things were done, and he would like to try to get me back into my old position again if I would undertake to let him see my chief's telegrams. They are all like that; as an honest man I was absolutely no use to him—but as his detective! Is it any wonder, then, that a man takes to drink?"

"But why didn't you go to the newspapers?" asked Ditte. "They take up the case for those that suffer injustice!"

"The papers—oh sainted simplicity!" Kramer raised his eyes towards heaven. "But I did go to

the papers, little child innocence—for I also was a simpleton then. But I was turned away everywhere. It could never be the duty of the press to attack one of the country's most devoted sons, they said. They probably phoned to His Lordship—to make money on it, I suppose. For one day all the rags had a paragraph on a madman who had been dismissed from the service of the Financial Genius because of irregularities, and who, as a return for being allowed to escape without further punishment, persecuted his Excellency and almost threatened his life. Everybody knew it was me; I was finished forthwith —even my nearest relatives began to feel that I was unbalanced. But they had always suspected something of the sort. I was no longer any good, neither as a bread-winner nor in society; Milady started nagging and set the girls against me, and one day they moved home to the old people. So that was that!

"When it had gone as far as that I *did* go mad—do you know what I did? I bought a big bouquet of flowers and went up to his Excellency with it. There were many congratulators there, for he had some great day or other; and I gave him my good wishes as spitefully as I knew how. Thank you, he said with a smile—thank you so much! and gave me a hundred-kroner note. So there I was. He had conquered once again. Is it any wonder that a man takes to drink? I walked right out and did it. I drank like a swine—just to feel equal with the rest

of the rabble. You cannot take up the competition, I told myself, until you have thoroughly wallowed in the mud!

"That was how I got the idea of going round congratulating people. It was not at all a bad business, especially in the beginning; for I turned the knife in the wound, so to say, under their very eyes. So they took to the purse to be rid of the sight. I took them in turn—the whole lot; and it was not very dear flowers, do you see. But gradually they forgot the origin of the matter—there remained only a poor sot who could be dismissed with a krone or two."

"I thought you mostly visited actors and authors and that kind," said Ditte.

"That was later, when things went badly and I couldn't afford to miss anything. Oh yes, I have been through it—because I believed in the world. There are only two kinds of men—the honest ones and the scoundrels; and the scoundrels are on top. The others go to the bottom, they are too heavy. Your sweetheart wants to reform society; I heard it through the wall and was highly amused."

"Karl Bakkegaards is not my sweetheart," said Ditte with a blush.

Kramer warded something off with his hand: "No confidences, if you please. He is a reformer of society—that is the only interesting point to me in this matter. Do you know what keeps the pro-

letariat down? Honesty, my dear. Rid the world of honesty and the problem is solved."

He went on talking. He was quite reasonable; it was as if he grew milder for every day. But at the same time he became weaker and weaker. A few days later he regretted having been so open with her. "I did tell you a good yarn the other day," he said. "Well, you don't believe everything you hear." But Ditte knew what to believe; Mother Geismar knew all about his family affairs when once she was put on the track. He had been married to the daughter of a big timber merchant who lived at a country seat near the coast. The daughters were married to military men; they had been given lots of money in dowry by the grandparents.

It was strange that he should so suddenly ship his oars; he did not appear to have any craving for alcohol. But he liked to talk; Ditte had to bring her work into his room and sit with him. Then he would lie talking in his snuffling pot-house jargon, telling her of all the tricks he had resorted to in order to keep the business going. He had presented to actors and singers bouquets from "a lady admirer who wishes to remain unknown"—because of her position, of course; he was the man to bring to the authors of first books the homage of the Nation; right up into court circles had he ventured—"a voice from the nameless thousands."

"But that is dreadful," laughed Ditte. "How-

ever did you get all those ideas? I shouldn't have had brains enough for that."

"Dreadful—no they were acts of blissful kindness; I don't think many people have brought so much happiness with them as has the Congratulator. But what have I got out of it? Yes, you bet it required brains! It was a case of perpetual extension of premises to save the business from going to pieces. I couldn't very well show myself too often at the same places. It is quite a new branch of national industry I have opened out. What a pity there's nobody to take over the concern when I'm gone. Are you taking those clothes to the pawnbroker this afternoon?"

No, Ditte would have nothing to do with that. "You cannot do without your only suit," she said.

"I shall never get up again," he replied. "Forty and finished. And it's a very pleasant thought. I catch myself lying here relishing the fact that I've done with shuffling about down here. It'll be such a joy to sit on the edge of a wet cloud singing Halleluja—and have a good laugh at the whole show."

In the afternoon while Ditte was out he got Old Rasmussen to go and pawn his clothes. "Take my boots and the hat and stick as well," he said, "then there'll be no danger of my coming back ghost-walking!" So the shirt was all he had.

But a day or two later he got up after all and ran out in the passage in his bare shirt. He had another attack, and the women had to send for the

baker's man to get him back to bed. "He's from Jutland, he's so dependable!" they said; and Læborg took him in his arms as calmly and easily as if the Congratulator were a small child, and carried him back to bed. Ditte no longer objected to sending him to the hospital; she was afraid of being alone with him in the night. But it was easier said than done; she must get a certificate, and then wait until there was room for him. That might take an eternity; Old Rasmussen had been informed that there was a bed vacant for her husband a year after he died.

"That is an easy matter—if only you know a policeman," said Mother Geismar. "The police can do everything." Cabman Olsen's wife had a brother who was a policeman, so they sent for him. He ordered the ambulance and sent the Congratulator to the hospital. "Now they've got to take him," said Geismar as they stood looking after the ambulance, which had attracted a crowd in the yard and in the street. "Good thing you got out of that, Fru Hansen."

Ditte did not reply, she had turned her back on them and stood looking after the car with quivering lips. With a heavy tread she went up to her flat and entered the Congratulator's room. She sat down on the edge of his bed and wept.

CHAPTER XI.

EVERYDAY LIFE.

AND so winter was there once more with snow and frost and cold. Summer rode on all too fast; one had scarcely got the clothes out of pawn when one had to pop 'em again. There was no stove in Old Rasmussen's room; and even if there had been one, where could she have found the fuel for it? She could not keep warm in the night, her blood was too thin; she put all her old clothes on top of the quilt, but it was of no avail. And the water froze both in jug and bucket. Ditte moved her into the Congratulator's room; it was more sheltered, and the door could be left open in the night so as to allow the heat to draw in. "For the time being," said Ditte. "If he comes back we'll find something else for you, mother." Kramer must know that if he recovered he had somewhere to go. But that did not seem likely. Ditte had visited him a few times at the hospital; he seemed to get weaker and weaker.

It was quite a comfort to have the old woman near and be able to keep an eye on her at night; Ditte slept more calmly now. There was also the

advantage that Karl could give notice where he lodged and take up his abode in Old Rasmussen's hole. That meant saving money and having him near. It was a case of combining forces against the common enemies, cold and unemployment; they gave one sufficient to think about.

In Karl's trade there was no work, but he earned his living by doing odd jobs; he went to the Vegetable Market, to the quay, to the Cattle Market—wherever there was hope of a take-on. He wore his shoes well down, and what bit of flesh he had put on during the summer disappeared as he chased about; but he was in good spirits. The greater part of his earnings he brought Ditte in any case, so she felt glad at the change; she would now be able to look after him in return. In the evening he sat in her room reading or writing articles for a small paper which the unemployed issued once a week. Sometimes he went to meetings.

"What good are your meetings?" said Ditte one day. "Last year you also held meetings, and there is much more unemployment this year. They don't care a bit what you say or do."

"Oh I don't think we impress them greatly," Karl admitted. "But we keep ourselves awake, at any rate—and probably shake life into a few others as well. As long as we can keep our gall flowing we haven't gone quite to the dogs. But the Samaritans have opened earlier than they did last year, and the papers are beating the big drum to get charity

on the move; so they must be a wee bit afraid of us."

"Isn't it rather that their hearts grow soft when they see all the misery?" asked Ditte.

"Maybe. At any rate they must see the need before they remember it is there. No one notices the dog that creeps into the corner and lies there licking its wounds. So we have been thinking of organizing a procession all through the town of those that have suffered most through unemployment, with wives and children, and preferably with their homes as well. In most cases the home is no more than could be put on a hand-cart. Will you come? It will probably be on Christmas eve, then the hearts are a little softer than on week-days."

No, Ditte had no inclination to exhibit her rags; she preferred to fight her battle alone. "Whyever do you want to do that?" she said. "What a queer idea!"

"We claim respect for the rags and we want to chase Charity down a mouse-hole; it won't do any harm to let them see how many we are! But it is possible that we ought to wait until later on in the winter. It is rather early yet!"

"It almost sounds as if you were speculating in their need and misery," said Ditte with a touch of reproach.

"And so I do. Among the Holy crowd at home they always said that privation and suffering were meant to drive man back to God. Only now do I

understand the meaning of it—hungry men must be transformed into hungry souls!"

Ditte sat listening. She faintly saw a deeper meaning behind his words, and no longer swept him out of her thoughts with the word "Godliness." "But what will you do with those who cannot become hungry souls, who merely want food when they feel hunger—me, for instance?" she asked seriously.

Karl looked at her in happy surprise; for the first time she abandoned her attitude of disdain and took up his thought. "We have no message at all for you. On the contrary—you have the message for us."

"I have? I who can hardly understand a word of it all!" She looked at him in alarm.

"Yes, because you are always the same, in fair weather and in foul; whether you were sitting on a throne or lying in a ditch I am sure you would be unalterably the same. Nothing can be changed in you, and nothing should be changed, for in a way it is towards you we are marching. As your heart beats so the heart of the world should beat, then the world would be a happy place."

"I don't think that would be a success," said Ditte blushing crimson—"for my heart goes madder and madder. Sometimes it is thumping, then it stops entirely. But I will see if I can get some bread and then we'll have a cup of coffee." They subsisted mainly on coffee and bread now. She got up and tied a shawl round her shoulders.

"I'm going round to see the old Ragpicker in the meantime," said Karl. "It's a long time since I saw him."

"Tell Old Rasmussen and the children to come in for coffee," said Ditte, "they're hanging up clothes on the loft. Bring the Ragpicker as well if he's in. Tell Old Rasmussen to put on the kettle!" she called from the stairway.

In the baker's shop Fru Langhalm was standing selecting bread for her afternoon coffee—crescents and buns. She was far gone and certainly did not attempt to hide the fact; she looked almost bold-faced, and could not understand the existence of any theme quite so interesting as her condition.

"How are you, Fru Langhalm?" asked the baker's lady at length.

"I have never felt better," she said happily. "I wish I could remain in this condition forever."

"The Lord preserve us!" exclaimed Driver Olsen's wife involuntarily. She did not take part in the conversation, of course; it simply flew out of her mouth.

"Madam Olsen has had eight," said the baker's lady in explanation. "Have you not?"

Madam Olsen nodded. "But as big as the lady I've never been," she said. "I always carried mine towards the back—and down."

Fru Langhalm looked proud: "I carry mine in front—my husband prefers it so. And it is the most healthy position too, both for the child and for the

mother. There is more room for it there. What do you think, Fru Hansen?"

Ditte did not know what to say.

"I say, as we are speaking about the matter—I should very much like you to be with me while I am in bed; you have got such a good way with everything. Have you had many children?"

"I have nursed children ever since I was a little girl," replied Ditte, feeling quite self-conscious at such praise and honor.

"We are glad we have no children," said the baker's lady. "Then there is no need to worry about them. There are difficulties enough without them."

"Yes, I heard you were going to close down the shop. Is it really such a bad position? We are so sorry you are leaving."

"We have toiled for fifteen years, and not a step further have we come. My husband is going to take a position as first hand; then we shall have our weekly income certain!"

Ditte had kept in the background—it was so awkward to ask for credit when others were present. Gradually they went away and Ditte put her question.

"You want me to put it down?" said the baker's lady. "I guessed it from your looks; I am getting quite clever at reading faces. But you owe something already, you know."

"It's only till Saturday," Ditte begged. "I get paid for my work and can pay it all then."

"Well, we have had to stop giving credit, we cannot afford to lose anything. But it is difficult to say no to you—you are such a helpful soul yourself. And then you always buy common bread when you have no money. Most people think: If we have to buy on credit we may as well have the best! That makes a great difference."

Ditte hurried upstairs with her loaf, she was happy and light-hearted. In the porch she ran right into the Collector from the sewing-machine shop, and she got such a fright that it made her jump. "I have just been up to your place," he said.

"Oh, but I have no money today," said Ditte catching her breath. "Couldn't you wait until Saturday—then I'll pay it all."

"I daresay I can," said he. "But don't let it run on, mind you!" He almost laughed at her alarm. "We don't eat people," he said and put the receipt back into his pocket-book again.

What a shock she had had! Her legs trembled beneath her as she went up the gloomy staircase.

Old Rasmussen had the coffee ready; where it stood on the stove it sent out its fragrance. She was sitting with Baby Brother on her lap telling stories to the two others; they stood one on each side of her staring eagerly into her face. It was her mouth they kept their eyes on; it was toothless, but the most wonderful things were created in there.

Ditte went straight up and placed her hand caressingly on the machine. She must *feel* that it was still there.

"Yes, he's just been, the Collector has!" said Old Rasmussen. "But they don't bite yet."

"I met him in the porch, and I did get such a fright—my legs would scarcely carry me. He put it off, as he did last time. But on Saturday he must have the money—wherever we are to take it from."

Old Rasmussen nodded with a mien which plainly said she knew all about it. "How much have you paid off on the machine?" she asked.

"Fifty kroner, mother!" replied Ditte proudly and put her hand caressingly on it again.

"You needn't worry then—it's too early yet! They won't bare their claws until the better part is paid. It wouldn't be to their advantage to take it from you yet. But you be careful—I know the hire-purchase shops; they are lenient until you feel secure. It's like the cat playing with the mouse; some day he'll bite."

The old woman had a terror for everything connected with payment by instalments; Ditte did not take her too seriously. "You always see things black, mother," she said and took her chin in her hand.

"Well, well, we'll see!" said the old woman.

But what had become of Uncle Karl? The coffee was getting cold. "Go and fetch him, children," said Ditte. In the same moment he came in.

"The Ragpicker was not there," he said seriously. "The place is cleared."

"Perhaps the agent has turned him out," said Ditte. "He probably couldn't pay, poor old soul."

"I thought he was allowed to live there for nothing?"

"Yes—that is, he had to tip the agent, of course."

"May we go down and play in the yard?" the children asked when they had eaten.

"No. The air is so bad down there. When I have finished I'll take you out for a walk—to King's Gardens. I shan't have time, tho, but you can go with Old Rasmussen and deliver my work." Ditte remembered several things she must have off her hands before the new work arrived.

"Isn't the air bad in King's Gardens?" asked the little ones.

"No, it is lovely and fresh there."

"Why is it so bad here then?"

Ditte didn't quite know—"Because we are poor, I suppose," she said.

And the children were no wiser, so they turned to the old woman. "Is that the devil's fault, too?" they asked.

"Yes, that is just the devil's fault," said Old Rasmussen with conviction. "For at the time when there was nothing more to grab, he wanted the Lord to put a glass cover over the whole world. Then people would have to buy their air, as they bought everything else—it wasn't right that the air should

be free, said he. And he had one son who hadn't got any business yet; all the others were in good positions. But the Lord wouldn't agree to that. That is the only thing the poor haven't got to pay for, said he. So the devil sat down and blew all the bad air into the poor quarters; keep together what goes together, was his idea. And the Lord couldn't say anything to that."

"What stuff to tell the children," said Ditte letting the machine hum.

"I wasn't made cleverer," replied Old Rasmussen offended. "But I suppose I'm too old to talk to." She went in to her own room. The children followed her and shut the door behind them; then there wouldn't be anybody meddling and saying "stuff." They knew who to believe, if it came to the point.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SOLID JUTLANDER.

THE Congratulator was dead. They had sent from the hospital to Ditte to ask if he had left anything to cover the expenses of the illness and funeral. There was a bunch of pawn tickets, and that was all; they could not use them. Ditte wanted to go to the funeral, but could not find out when it would take place. As nobody offered to pay the cost, he would simply be put away. He had been a trouble to Ditte; but for all that it gave her a queer feeling that he had gone and that she should see him no more. With all his assumed cynicism he was simply a great child.

But there was no call to stop and mourn—anything but pitying the dead. When all was said they were fortunate—they were provided for. Whether it was the cold or privation that swept a path through the poor, or whatever it was due to—there were an unusual number of deaths. Old Rasmussen insisted on the point, and there was surely something in it.

One morning they found Beard of Hearts dead in his den behind Old Rasmussen's hole—he had

frozen to death. The police fetched him away during the day, and they also took away the mysterious mattress. It was cut open at the police station, but coppers there were none. So that, too, was a lie—Old Rasmussen thought as much. But it was stuffed with long hair, which might well be the hair of all his sweethearts. Cases were known of men cutting the hair of all the women they came across. Maybe one of them had taken his beard—as a revenge. Well, he was gone at any rate—the rats had already been at him when he was found.

In the front building the police had paid a visit to the missionary's one day to examine the child. Somebody had reported them; it was found in a dreadful condition of starvation and ill-treatment, and was taken to the hospital. They also found out that the missionary's were not the child's parents at all; they had taken the child for a sum down. So *that* load was removed from Ditte's heart; she drew her breath easier. She had suffered by the incessant crying which cut its way to the heart and at the same time blunted with its persistence until at last one did not hear anything.

Old Rasmussen was right when she said: "When once fate opens its bag there's no limit to its generosity." No sooner had they shut the door after one disaster than another was on the stairs.

In the afternoon of the day when the missionary's child had been taken away, the baker's man stood in the yard washing the covered hand-cart in which he

brought bread round to the shops and customers. It was always a pleasure to see Læborg washing the cart—he did keep it nice. And the man himself was capable and well dressed and so sober! From all the windows the tenants kept an eye on him; the maids in the front building busied themselves by the sink near the window. It was really cheering to look at him after all the sad tidings; and he rolled his R's and spoke broadly. But then he was from Jutland, from the meagre lands where one learns to keep an eye on what one has got. He was a farmer's son, and had money at the bottom of the chest although his wages were low. There were the tips, of course! "They amount to quite as much as his wages," said Fru Nielsen—"but he honestly deserves it; he is so solid!"

To think that he should be the next!

For he was indeed solid—and a good man, too; the children loved him! They stood in a crowd round him, screaming every time he threw a bucket of water into the cart to clean it. They got it over their legs. Then the old women in the windows laughed, and Læborg nodded up to them and laughed; not a bit stuck-up. The girl that was lucky enough to get him would have a good husband! But he did not even have a sweetheart. Rumor said that he had proposed to Ditte, the stairwoman, and had been refused. It sounded mad, but it might be true; apparently she was born with a dread for the bridal bed. The bed of love she had evidently not

shunned! She also sat by the window, sewing collars, with the children round her, busy as ever. Læborg greeted her—he even took off his cap to her! And she nodded back and smiled, as if there had never been anything serious between them.

And just then it happened. The way of it was this, that firm steps sounded suddenly in the porch. Those steps nobody in the buildings could mistake, and numerous faces pressed against the windows. The policeman walked straight up to Læborg, did not return his greeting, but put a hand on his shoulder. For a moment it seemed as if Læborg would strike him; then he pulled himself together and tried his gift of persuasion of speech on the policeman. But he could have saved himself the trouble. One might as well have tried to tickle the Round Tower into moving as to talk oneself out of the grip of the copper when he had got his claw in. Læborg had to go.

There was a stir in the building. The women flew off, one with a basket and one with a jug—they suddenly found that they must go to the baker for bread and cream. Ditte had no time to go herself, but she sent Old Rasmussen; the old woman returned dumbfounded. "Now the world is coming to an end!" said she—"Just listen. Will you believe it, he's defrauded them! The solid Jutlander had been cheating them all through the fifteen years."

She was quite breathless with emotion.

"Has Læborg?" exclaimed Ditte and let drop her work. "That nice man!"

"Aye, and fairly, too. And he has kept accounts of his swindling—thorough man that he is. He has kept two accounts, it seems, one for himself and one for the baker; and then he went and gave them the wrong book this morning. Isn't it strange that he should go and give himself away like that when his mind was running on other things; and him such an orderly man in every way. At first they wouldn't believe it and kept looking at that queer book: Done master out of two kroner on bread delivered, stolen and sold buns and cakes for four Kroner—and whatever it said, page after page. He certainly hasn't spared them much, that's a fact. No wonder they couldn't get on—Fru Nielsen said so herself; she was crying, poor soul. And now they've got to quit and him start as a journeyman, all because of that thief. If they'd only had a good time themselves for the money—so she said, the missus; then they'd have had some fun out of it. But I always thought there was something fishy about it—nice man though he be. Men are blackguards, and the handsomest are often the worst."

Ditte could not help smiling. "You always thought that, did you mother? I thought you liked him so much."

"Well—he always greeted me so nicely, poor old devil that I am. Good day, Fru Rasmussen, he'd say. It often set me wondering, for why should he

be the only one to call me Fru? But they are all cheats."

Yes, Ditte agreed there. She was no longer surprised at anything. Everybody had to look after oneself in here, at any rate when one ventured outside the buildings. If she sent Peter on an errand he was often being cheated, and even Old Rasmussen had to be careful; her eyesight was failing, and they took advantage of that. The hucksters of the quarter had a hard time; they were so close to each other, so numerous that each had to live on the tenants along one single stairway. They were forced to cheat on weight and measure in order to exist. And the customers in their turn cheated the hucksters; they borrowed bottles which they did not return but sold elsewhere; they bought on credit—and one fine day they cleared off and left their debts behind. There was nothing much to be said in either case—it was simply a matter of being on guard. The same thing happened in Ditte's trade when she fetched her work; if she was not careful they would give her insufficient material and then she had to buy it herself—out of her sourly gained earnings. It was a continuous battle. And the same conditions obtained everywhere.

She felt secure only in the buildings. There might be many things against several of the inhabitants—most of them had fallen foul of the law—but they stuck together. They helped each other wherever they could, and turned a common front towards the

wicked outside world. If they had anything good they offered one a taste; they simply couldn't bear to keep anything, must spend it at once. That was right enough from one point of view; they were neither pushing nor thrifty, most of them lived from hand to mouth. But Ditte liked them like that. There were a few of the other kind, too, of course—ambitious persons whose goal was a better quarter, as for instance the seamstress in the neighboring house. They were not so nice.

Ditte herself had no longer any ambitions, the fight for existence from day to day gave her sufficient to think of. With a sigh of relief she went to sleep every night—that day had gone. And it was with something akin to dread that she opened her eyes to a new day. She was no longer young in spirit.

Neither did she look young—in spite of her twenty-five years. She had grown thin, the bleedings had taken both flesh and color. Her varicose veins were worse, and towards evening her legs were often quite swollen and spongy round the ankles. Her face bore the imprint of many an experience; she had already a whole life behind her, full of burdens. She knew it all quite well, and the thought that once upon a time she had been beautiful—so beautiful that people in the street turned to look at her—filled her with a strange satisfaction. It did not last long; she recalled the preceding period, when she was full of conflicts and yearnings for her body to unfold. Like

a short-lived flower had been happiness, maturity and beauty, like those flowers that give of their splendor but one day and one night. She had not wasted it for her own gratification: the bleedings were due to childbirth at too early an age; varicose veins and swollen legs she acquired as a domestic servant; the wrinkles of her face—well, they were gathered along many lanes.

Whatever might be the causes—Ditte did not sit in judgment over herself or others; she merely felt tired and worn out. Nobody would think of turning round to look at her now, and she felt grateful for it. Neither had she any reason to show off her clothes. She stole along close to the walls, as invisible as possible and sped homeward. Karl's defiance she did not possess; when he wanted her to come out she generally made the excuse that her clothes were not good enough. Neither was he well dressed, but he did not creep into the corners for that reason; on the contrary, he walked right through the fashionable streets in his dilapidated boots and frayed trousers. "Why should I give them the pleasure of seeing me sneak into the side streets?" he said. "As long as I am willing to recognize them they *have* to recognize me!"

So she went with him—let herself be dragged out; but she had no courage. The walk was a torment to her.

The only thing that kept her up was the care of the children; they still bound her to life. Karl occa-

sionally had the impression that she felt she would soon die—and that she was glad of it. She was so distant at times; he could scarcely call her back. But the children could rouse her blood; where they were seriously concerned her being became like steel once more, strong and pliant. They loved her and she was glad of that, though she continued to feel that she did not deserve it. What she was capable of giving them corresponded in such a slight degree to what she wished to give.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SEWING-MACHINE, THE QUILT, AND THE SAMARITAN.

THE bakers, had won in the lottery! At any rate, something had happened that was quite as surprising—they would get all their money back!

They found that Læborg, during the fifteen years he had been with them, had defrauded them of exactly 15,000 kroner. He was a man of method! He did not waste the money but put it in various Savings Banks; some of it he had lent privately against security and a high interest, and for the rest he had bought a home. He had a nice bachelor's home—there was even a piano!

The baker had already been repaid the greater part of the money, and he would get the rest when the home had been sold; they would not lose much. Fru Nielsen beamed all over—it was like opening a big, fat saving-box.

They were lucky to have been under such capable administration! Who could say whether there would have been anything over if they had managed their own affairs? A little bit more or a little bit

less—they generally used it all. He was a manager indeed—fifteen thousand kroner in fifteen years! He wasn't from Jutland for nothing! It was really a pity he had to go to prison. Nielsen had already mentioned taking him on again when the two years were gone; he was so thorough!

Other people hadn't the good fortune to possess such a savings-box. In all the small flats in the middle- and back-buildings they were on short commons, in some places even sheer need grinned right in their faces. Need was a bad companion when first it got a foot inside the door; it shared one's table and slept in one's bed. The men were hanging about the porch most of the day unable to kill time; in the afternoon they generally drifted out. Some of them went to meetings where they passed resolutions of protest against the present state of affairs, demanding that the State should intervene; others, who were not interested in politics, went to taverns. One thing was worth as much—or as little—as the other. Those that went to meetings came home banging the table with their fists, threatening to take the reins into their own hands; those returning from the taverns were just as brave. Neither procedure resulted in money for the household. The women borrowed from one another; it was as when cripple supports cripple—it did not result in much. They went from place to place seeking help, generally in vain; the need was so great, nothing sufficed. Now there was a distribution by the Trade Unions, then

there were arrangements for local relief; as often as not it was only a rumor, created by a too fertile imagination, leading to nothing.

One day just after New Year they came unexpectedly and took the sewing machine away. It was like a stab in the back; Ditte was merely a couple of weeks behind, she had often been that—they had almost encouraged her to it! And she was willing to find the money in the course of the day. But they did not want the money, they wanted the machine.

It was not of much use at the moment, she could dispense with it. But Ditte cried bitter tears for all that, not so much because she had paid off nearly a hundred kroner which were now wasted, as because she had taken a liking to it. It had been like a good comrade—it had found her bread as long as possible! When she sat down to work and felt the machine under her hand it was like touching a faithful being. Its hum had accompanied her thoughts and sorrows and lulled the children to sleep. When they went to sleep in the evening the machine was still working; when they woke up in the morning they were greeted by its hum. In the end they believed it went on working night and day. "Mother never sleeps!" said Peter—as if speaking of some incomprehensible quality in the mother.

Old Rasmussen also cried. Spiteful though she had felt against the machine in the beginning, she had often had to thank it for her daily bread.

Neither of them comprehended the stillness and emptiness, nor did the children. Ditte felt the loss right out in her hands which were no more to touch the polished oaken table, or to spool, or to reverse the gear—right down in her feet which no longer rocked the rhythm of work into her existence. When she had something to sew she would run out to an acquaintance of hers who possessed a machine, chiefly so that she might recall the feeling of it and hear the well-known hum.

It was a serious happening after all, for without the machine she could not take on any work for the firm; it did happen that there was a dozen collars or two to be had if she pestered them stubbornly. She talked it over with Old Rasmussen, and they agreed that they could do without the best quilt; that was the only thing they possessed worth pawning. If they put the under-quilt on top, and the old woman was given Ditte's under-quilt, they could manage. Ditte and the children could do without an under-quilt—they were sweating in the night. The good quilt was wrapped in a sheet and Ditte went to the pawn shop. Peter was allowed to come with her and help carry it; he was as full of the question of the machine as was the mother—dear considerate little chap! "When you get your machine back we'll take care they don't get hold of it again," he said. "I'll watch by the door the whole time; and if they come I'll tell them you aren't at home."

Ditte smiled: "You be sure they won't get a

chance to take it away again!" she said decisively.

They got ten kroner for the quilt and hurried on to Grey-Friar Place where the shop was. It was bitingly cold, but neither of them noticed it, they were much too excited. "Do you know, mother—you've got red cheeks," said Peter and looked happily at her.

"So have you, sonny—apple cheeks!" answered Ditte and took a firmer hold of his hand.

"Do you know what I am glad for? I am glad we shall have the machine back before Uncle Karl comes back. We won't let him know that they took it from us."

Karl had gone into the country to find some means of existence. As soon as he got work, he sent a letter and money.

In Grey-Friar Place they had built a huge snowman—collecting money for the poor. He had two lumps of coals for eyes and a big tin with a slit in between his knees. "May I give him my money, mother—it's for the poor," said Peter.

"Yes do, sonny," replied Ditte. Peter got busy digging down between coat and lining, and from the depths he pulled out a bit of creased newspaper containing three one-öre pieces. He got them a long time ago when he ran an errand for Cab Driver Olsen—and he had innumerable plans connected with them; now they went.

The owner of the sewing machine shop did not recognize Ditte at all, strange to say; he was very

dismissive. "We can do nothing about it," he said coldly. "You have not fulfilled the conditions, and we have been lenient with you long enough. How do you think our business could exist if we were to drag the machines back and forth in that manner, according to people's whims? We could shut up at once then. But you can have another machine —on a new contract, that is."

Ditte stared at him uncomprehendingly—her eyes filled with tears. "I have three little children," she said, "without the machine I can't—I don't know what to do at all." She stood with the ten-kroner note in her hand, as if trusting that that would soften him. He stared at it, his eyes sticking out as if on stalks.

"I am sorry; but we really cannot provide for your—" he stood turning the leaves of an account book over, shifting his eyes from the pages of the book to the note in her hand and back again. "Let me see, you owe exactly—Here we are. Eight kroner, if you please—two kroner change!" He reached out for the note.

But Ditte quickly withdrew her hand; she fled in terror out into the street, dragging Peter with her. Only when she had reached the other side of the Place did she stop and look back. "You accursed blood-sucker!" she said and shook her fist towards the shop. "I hope he'll feel sometime what it is to be poor." They sauntered towards the Church of the Holy Ghost.

"I'll save up money for a new machine for you, mother," said Peter. "I can earn money—if only you'll let me."

"You are a dear boy, but you are too small yet," said Ditte. "When you are bigger——"

"Selma's Ejnar is no bigger than me, and he goes out every day. He promised to take me to some good places."

Ditte did not reply—she did not like it. The town was so big, and full of dark and uncanny mysteries—she herself feared its underworld, a child she did not dare to send into it. But Peter put down her silence as tacit consent—otherwise she would have said definitely No.

They passed a big restaurant and stood for a moment on the grating above the deep kitchen windows to feel the warmth before they continued on their way. Many other beings stood here besides them, the gratings were filled with women and children. A man came up from down there and chased them away—they were in the light. So they drifted on, Peter with one hand in the pocket of mother's old coat. When she too put her hand down it was warm—and they touched each other! The other hand he had put inside the trousers' lining, on his bare stomach. It was bitterly cold now they had defeat dogging them.

"Shan't we go to a Samaritan—I'm so hungry," whimpered Peter suddenly.

Ditte had expected that, she was so hungry her-

self that her inside hurt; it must be due to smell of food which oozed up from the restaurant kitchen. But she didn't like the Samaritan, so many people from her quarter came here.

"We needn't go to the one in Queen's Cross Street," said Peter—"there's one at Vesterbro, in Abel Katrine Street."

"How do you know that?" asked Ditte in surprise.

"Ejnar told me," replied Peter falteringly.

They took the way down Gammel-strand and across Storm Bridge so as to avoid the fashionable quarter. Peter had no objection to looking at the gorgeous shops, but Ditte would not go that way. When they had walked on for a while Peter suddently said: "Don't be cross with me, but I've been there myself—with Ejnar. I was afraid to tell you. You won't smack me, will you?"

No, Ditte certainly wouldn't do that. "Do you think I do too much smacking, then?" she asked despondently.

"Not as much as you used to," replied Peter, looking at her frankly.

The answer did her good. How often, when something went wrong—when they broke something or dirtied themselves—and she had punished them, she had regretted it afterwards and promised herself not to allow annoyance to get the upper hand again. It was simply unbearable when afterwards they sat chattering with a light heart, doubly tender

towards her, finding a source of entertainment in their very punishment. She felt an abyss between their minds and her own—their inexhaustible capacity to forget and forgive, and her own unreasonable severity. Poverty made her poor in forbearance and broadness of mind, and that must not be; she *would* be kind and sympathetic! Yet she felt remorse—she could not see any improvement in herself. And here was Peter, telling her unchallenged that she was better! She could have hugged him for joy.

"I shall never smack you again, for you don't deserve it," she said. "But we won't have secrets from each other any more, will we? It's so hideous."

"But we may keep good secrets—for instance if I buy you a machine," said Peter.

The Samaritan was on a loft above a large brewery; it was beautifully warm. They pushed in at one of the tables.

Round the long plank tables people sat eating, each with a basin of hot milk and a pile of bread and lard or margarine in front of him. One could see they were starving, they encircled their portions with their arms as if afraid that someone might take it, and bent over the basins. They were mostly old men, and women with children. Terribly lonely and ravaged they looked, the old men; all of them resembling ragpickers, and the grey machine-cut heads evidently never knew water. Poor old va-

grants they are, having no relatives on earth, not a living soul to help them and keep them straight! Ditte sat wishing she knew where her old Ragpicker was.

"You don't happen to know an old Ragpicker called Rindom?" she asked her neighbor.

The old man raised his head from the basin and focussed his spotted eyes on her. "Yes I do, for he's a colleague of mine," he answered, cutting his bread into cubes with a large broad-bladed pocket knife. "He worked here at Vesterbro for a spell; but now he's back at his old haunts round Borger Street, I think. It's the chap what got the Life-Saving Medal, isn't it?"

Ditte did not know.

"Oh yes, he saved a couple of children from drowning in the City Moat, and so they gave him the Medal; he was a policeman then. But one night he went and copped a person whom it wouldn't do to arrest at all, and so he was dismissed."

People came and went. As soon as one had finished he pushed out and made room for another. There were no empty seats; by the door a crowd was waiting. They did not speak to each other but bent down, gulped their food and slunk out again. Ditte and the old man were the only two who spoke. Several faces were directed towards them; so they too grew silent.

A dark-haired young lady brought the food for

Ditte and Peter. Ditte nodded, it was the daughter of a house where she had once been in service. "How are you?" the young lady asked. "You *have* altered! Are you married? Does he drink?" She was gone before she could have had an answer; and Ditte was grateful that explanations were thus avoided.

Suddenly Peter gripped her arm: "Mother, there's Uncle Karl!" He was almost feverish with joy and wanted to leave his seat. Ditte had to restrain him.

Karl stood at the entrance looking about; he seemed dirty and exhausted. When his eye caught them a happy smile crossed his face. He came up to them quickly. "Is there a little room between you?" he said, pushing in next to Peter.

Ditte and Peter had to go—others were waiting. "We'll wait for you outside," she said.

They did not wait for many minutes. "That was quick work," said Ditte. "Did you get enough?"

"Yes, thanks! It's not the kind of place where you want to stay longer than is necessary. Charity is a disgusting thing, after all!"

Ditte fully agreed. "But we accept it—glad to get anything at all to eat," she said.

"Yes, of course. We are like the ship-wrecked men one sometimes reads about in books—they starve until at last they throw themselves over the excrements." His journey had resulted in nothing. "How have you been doing?" he asked.

Ditte told him about the machine. He clenched his fists: "If I'd only been there it wouldn't have come off!" he said.

"Then they'd have fetched the police," she replied. "You can do nothing to scoundrels like that; they have the law on their side."

"Yesterday in Sakso Street the landlord turned a pal of mine and his family out in the street," said Karl. "But some of us carried the furniture up into the flat again, and forced him to put back doors and windows—he had removed them. It's like getting rid of bugs!"

"Yesterday?" said Ditte surprised. "I thought you only returned today. Why didn't you come home?"

It seemed that Karl had been here for several days and kept to Sakso Street; he felt ashamed to come home with empty hands.

It was now evening, the street lamps were being lit. Karl could not go home with them, he was going out with a pal to look after some fishing nets which the latter had put out down Köge Bay way. "But I'll come tomorrow morning," he said, "then I'll bring you some fish. Perhaps money as well—if we are lucky." He accompanied them on their way; this time Peter had his wish fulfilled, they walked through the fashionable quarter. Whilst Karl and Ditte walked slowly discussing their affairs, the boy kept crossing the street to look at all the windows.

When Ditte and Peter were alone again they discussed whether to go to the pawn broker and get the quilt back while they had the money. But it proved impracticable—they had no money for the interest.

"Well, then Old Rasmussen and the little ones are going to have a treat," declared Ditte. They went down to her grocer and bought in a salted herring, some lard, beans, and a piece of salt sausage. Ditte put her note on the desk; she immediately regretted it, but it was too late.

"You're flush with money today," said the grocer bowing. "Madam will permit me to deduct what's owing?"

She got about a krone back. So the note had gone —and the quilt. The sewing machine she would never see again!

But she did see it again after all. One morning she visited a woman she knew in Adel Street, a poor woman whose position was the same as Ditte's—no man to provide for her and a couple of small babies. She had just got a machine on the hire system, she wanted to try sewing for shops—working men's garments; she had heard it paid so well. "I hope they haven't done me," she said. "Try it; you know about machines."

Ditte sat down and began to work. Suddenly she stopped and drew a deep breath, she felt a strange warmth in her hands; a warm stream flowed from them to her and made her heart tender. She stared

at the machine, at the number, at all details. Then her head drooped onto her arm; she rested on the machine table, as she had done so often. And a tear fell—as so often—onto the table, releasing a certain intimate odor of turpentine. The friend put her hand on her shoulder.

"Are you ill?" she asked. "What is the matter?"

Ditte raised her head and forced a smile: "Oh it's nothing; I felt a bit queer. Did you buy the machine new?"

"Yes—well, I thought it was new when I selected it. But I think it must have been used after all. Isn't it good?"

"Yes, it's a splendid machine," said Ditte with desperate humour. "But you must look well after it so it won't run off somewhere else when you've paid a hundred kroner on it. It's trained to do that. They have a score of machines that are trained to move about plundering poor seamstresses. It's a good business, they say."

"Ugh—that's the kind of thieves I've fallen amongst! But I'll manage that affair all right, for in the spring I'm going to Sweden to get married to my sweetheart. Then they can look in the directory for their machine."

Karl arrived next morning, thoroughly frozen but with a nice dish of fish and five kroner in his pocket. He was in high spirits. "We are going

out again tonight," he said. "It's a matter of taking the chance before the sea freezes. If only I'd had oilskins; it's a bit chilly to be soaked through during the whole night in frost like this."

"Shall I go to Isted Street and see if they've got a set?" asked Ditte. "Father deals in all sort of things. They can surely let us have credit." Karl would rather wait for a few days and see how the weather turned out. If the southern course froze down it would be no use. The boats inside the Devil's Isle were already frozen in. "But then we'll find another plan," he said cheerfully; he must try to keep up Ditte's spirits.

She fried fish for him and gave him a cup of strong coffee to thaw him out. Then he wanted to go to the boxroom for a sleep; but this she would not permit. "You'll go and sleep in Old Rasmussen's bed," she decided, "out there everything is frozen right through. We'll be as quiet as mice."

"You can fire a big gun right above my head if you like," said Karl yawning. He could scarcely keep his eyes open. When he had gone to sleep Ditte fetched his clothes to put them round the stove to dry. He was lying with his arms crossed, fast asleep; his face was calm, with an almost happy expression. That was because he had earned a little money again; one could see from his sleep that he was in work. For a moment she stood watching him, then she tiptoed up and kissed him on the mouth. He stirred, but did not wake up.

Ditte went in to look over his clothes, she brushed them and hung them up to dry. It was nice to feel the garments between her hands; it reminded her of the time when Lars Peter was a fisherman.

CHAPTER XIV.

LITTLE PETER.

PETER ought to have begun school last autumn; but for some reason or other he did not. Ditte had never been visited by the authorities because of her foster-children; gradually she had come to believe that the world lived in happy ignorance of her little nest. She herself would never dream of attracting attention to it. But when Peter was playing with Ejnar one day, Selma, Ejnar's mother, suddenly hit upon the fact that Peter didn't go to school. She said to another woman that this was strange, as he was in his eighth year! And the women took the matter up, and discussed the strangeness of it all through the buildings. Did she imagine herself to be above the law, did she think her children were exempted from frequenting school and learning anything—just like the Royal children? Cabman Olsen's wife let loose on Ditte and said it was a serious affair, for according to the law every child in the country must be given religious instruction. Whether one starved or not, religion one must have; for it was ordained by God Himself that the poor should have equal

access with the rich to his gifts of grace. She herself had had eight, so she knew all about it.

Ditte felt her ears burn. "I really haven't offered it a thought," said she.

That was not strictly true, for Peter had often enough reminded her of the question and asked to be sent to school. Ejnar told the most wondrous tales from the school, about kind teachers and teachers that were clean daft, and about boys who stood up to a box on the ear without uttering a sound; they didn't even draw back when it landed. Peter had gone so far as to declare one day: "If you won't take me to school I'll go by myself. I *will* begin school!" He felt it was a shame to be behind the others. But Ditte suspected and distrusted everything that had to do with the authorities; besides, she couldn't do without him very well, as he must look after the babies when Old Rasmussen went out to earn a bit towards the common fund.

But now the question became acute. Ditte wasted a whole day in running about for certificates and God knows what—a whole machinery was set moving in order that her little Peter might begin to plow through Luther's Minor Catechism. Fortunately Cabman Olsen's wife had experience from her eight and knew what was required. Old Rasmussen must go with Peter and demand admission; Ditte dared not go herself. "I haven't time!" said she.

"If they make a fuss because it's too late, you

just tell 'em he's been in the country for glands," said Cabman Olsen's wife.

But they accepted him without any trouble, the certificates were all in order—and now Peter was a school-boy. It was obvious from the very first day. His voice became still deeper; the line between his eyes appeared more frequently. Very severe he could be if everything did not go as it ought to; heaven help them if they did not see that he was out of the door at the right time. Then he simply walked off—leaving his food or whatever it might be behind. He was exact enough to be an engine-driver; Old Rasmussen got quite feverish about him. "It's only half past seven," she said, "you can take it easy!"

"It's five minutes to eight," he replied shortly and was off in the same instant. And he was right, too, for a little later it struck eight. What a nuisance the good clock that could both cuckoo and strike the hour had gone! That he should pop even that, the toper, just for the sake of getting a booze! It was thirty years ago now, but Old Rasmussen was as annoyed as if it had happened yesterday.

Ditte was early up, she was to do washing for a family in Great King Street; at five o'clock she had to be there to light the fire under the copper so the laundry should have plenty of time to boil. She had put on the water for the morning coffee; she left the lamp in the kitchen so as not to wake the chil-

dren. Peter was restless in his sleep at this period —it was the school! She stood by the window in the moonshine, combing her thin hair; what she combed off she screwed up and put in the table drawer; she would have it made up into a plait— when she could afford it.

The moon shone down into the yard which was white with snow; a peculiarly sharp, bluish light dawned down there; every object stood out clearly but strangely unsubstantial. Suddenly the light was disturbed, it seemed to waver; the trap door of the cabman's closed manure-pit opened by itself—quite fantastic it looked. A form appeared from out of the pit, swathed in steam from the warm manure. The form pulled up a sack and closed the door carefully—it was the old Ragpicker. Ditte hurried to open the window, making a noise so that he should hear her, and beckoned. He raised his Sign of Seven—he had seen her. Shortly after she heard him on the stairs.

"Come and have a drop of hot coffee," she whispered and got him into the room. Peter would probably wake up because of the light, but that couldn't be helped.

Driver Olsen went down to feed the horses; it was a stroke of luck that the old man had escaped.

"It's better he shouldn't see me there, for then he'd be obliged to report me; he might lose his job if he didn't," said the old man.

"Have you nowhere to live—not in the daytime

either?" asked Ditte, shivering as she looked at him.

"No. Business is going to pieces. Formerly I sorted the pickings myself—and got something decent out of it; but now I have to sell the whole shoot to pickers that are better off. They have to make a profit before they pass it on to the stores, from there it goes to the agent and from him again to the wholesaler. There are so many that have to live on the dustbins that there's hardly anything left for the man that picks 'em. Dear, dear, it's a rotten job! In the daytime—then I sit in a corner of a tavern, if I've made enough. For that costs money—everything costs money!"

"Come up here when you have finished your round," said Ditte. "It's warm, at any rate, and you can have a chat with Old Rasmussen."

"Thank you kindly, but—No, that won't do—all the filth I'm dragging with me! They barely allow me inside the taverns—the stink is that bad. Often they complain, then I have to hoof it in the streets."

Yes, heaven knows he stank, poor soul; Peter lay rubbing his little india-rubber nose as if he had got flies in it. But for all that one couldn't let him live in the street. "You just come," said Ditte cheerfully, "the children like you so much."

"It doesn't matter about the stink; we can hold our noses," said Peter, lifting his head.

"What, are you awake?" said the old man, poking at him with the Sign of Seven. "Hold your nose, eh—there's many people doing that when they meet

me; but what about it—one's got to put up with it. Every trade has it drawbacks!"

"If only I knew a place where you could stay in the night," said Ditte musingly. "I suppose Karl's room would be too cold?—he's away every night now." But the old man would not hear of it. "I'm no longer fit to be among decent people," he said.

No, that was just it; Ditte's heart was at war with her sense of cleanliness. It was impossible to keep him clean—how could one expect it, rooting in the filth as he was doing. Poor old soul—he could scarcely sit quiet on the chair. "Wouldn't they take you in at the Alms-house?" she asked.

The old man got to his feet. "If you try to get me there I don't know what I'll do to myself," he said; he was shaking with fear. "But I must be off!" He shouldered his sack.

"You won't be able to see for some hours yet; won't you stay until it's properly light?" said Ditte persuasively. But he could not rest.

"I'm going out to St. Vibenshus to fetch a loaf. You get it at half price there if you come before six."

"Ugh, that's a long walk!" It suddenly appeared to Ditte that she was absurdly well off.

"One might as well be hoofing it along Lyngby Road as anything else," replied the old man. "One's got to kill time somehow. Well, good bye—and

God bless you and yours for the sake of your kind heart."

When Ditte had lighted the old man down the stairs Peter got a cup of coffee. He didn't ask for it exactly, but lay looking at the pot with covetous eyes, moving his lips mutely and smiling. Little scamp—he was quite irresistible! "But then you must lie down and go to sleep again," said Ditte. "It isn't five o'clock yet. Old Rasmussen will call you. Walk decently when you go to school and when you come back again, and behave yourself so they won't say: Mother Ditte must be a bad 'un to have such children. Tell Old Rasmussen that there is a piece of pressed pork for Uncle Karl. Tell her to look after him, and if he's wet when he comes home she mustn't let him go and sleep in his own room. If there isn't enough coke——"

"I'll see to that; mother needn't trouble about that," Peter interrupted in a deep voice.

"Thank you, sonny. Help Old Rasmussen to remember to go to the District Inspector." She stood thinking for a moment. "I think that's all then," she said, kissing the boy. She blew out the lamp and left.

As soon as mother had gone Peter jumped up and dashed into his clothes. There wasn't much fun in lying there snoozing; he had got a brilliant idea. Old Rindom was trotting along towards St. Vibenshus; it must be great fun to be out in the night—he would get hold of Ejnar and go picking coke at the

wharf at Lersö. They would be back before school-time, and then they could have the afternoon for play. He fetched the sack from under the kitchen table and tiptoed downstairs. It was dark, and he was a little frightened, but when once he reached the yard he felt brave. He walked quickly towards laborer Andersen's window and knocked; Andersen himself was in hospital, otherwise he would not have dared to do it.

"Who's that?" asked Selma's voice fearfully.

"May Ejnar come out—picking coke?" asked Peter.

"Lor', child, is it you—are you up this time of night?" asked Selma, and pulled him indoors. The room was warm and stuffy; they had that one room only, and the whole crowd slept there. Beds were made in all corners, on chairs along the walls, and on the floor. Ejnar got into his clothes in a hurry; his eyes were sparkling with the spirit of adventure.

The two urchins went off towards the big wharves at Lersö. When they were right on the Common it struck them that it was nearer to go to Frihavnen; and so it was—from home! They turned and ran to make up for lost time. At the Triangle a policeman appeared from a dark porch and looked meaningly at the two boys rushing along North Frihavns. Road with each his sack; otherwise there was nobody about except a couple of women walking towards the big newspaper offices to fetch the morning papers.

At Frihavnen there was no hope of getting in this time of the night, and to get away with something in the sack was quite out of the question. Ejnar knew all about it! But one might tease the blood-hounds that ran up and down between the two iron railings; it was great fun to see them biting the iron bars, frothing with rage, thinking they'd got their teeth into a skinny boy's leg. Then the watchman came up inside the fence, he too frothing—and just as impotent behind the iron bars as were the hounds.

North of Frihavnen there was a stretch of the bay now partly filled up, with remains of old moles and fragments of quays. Boats, small schooners and tugs were lying there; wheel tracks criss-crossed between condemned boats, rusty boilers and other monstrously queer objects. Along the wheel tracks bits of coal lay on the ground. It sometimes happened that the lower parts of the wooden fence round the big stacks gave way under the pressure of the coals, and they trickled right out on the track. Then it was easy to sit down and pick half a sackful—and nobody could call it stealing. But it was just as well not to be seen! Neither was it easy for anybody to clap eyes on them; like rats they scampered in and out between flat old railway trucks, sheds and upturned boats.

Ejnar had been there often; but for Peter it was all new and exciting and he made no attempt to hide the fact. But stranger than all was the night itself.

He had never really been in it before; everything impressed him so wondrously, it made his heart beat in his throat. It was as if all the universe held its breath, the moon shone in quite another way than in the evening when, as it were, it did not dare to come out because of the street lamps. Now it simply shouted its light across the world; and the stars blinked frequently as if tired of keeping awake. The snow crackled under the light from the moon, and out in the solemn water the forts lay sleeping. Out there ships were returning; like rows of light they slipped in across the water. They were route-steamers from the provinces.

"If we'd been at Kvæsthus Bridge now we might have made a bit out of carrying people's bags," said Ejnar.

Peter had no idea where Kvæsthus Bridge was. But he did know that one couldn't be everywhere at once, for Old Rasmussen always said that. And he was quite satisfied with what he was doing.

When they had got as much in the sacks as they could carry they hid them beneath a boat and ran down to the water to see if the ice would bear. They roused a few ducks that were sleeping on the sea; like a long soft quaver the ducks pushed outward, low above the water, plopping in farther out with a long train of foam in their wake. A factory whistle called, then one more; so it was quarter to six! The whistles warned the workers that it was time to leave home.

From the fairway a signal sounded. Soon after a long rolling sound was heard; it was like an unending succession of drum-beats. "That is from Hens Bridge," said Ejnar, "the workers are crossing over to Refshale Isle. They walk on a row of planks that are put on the water, and they can't get back until dinnertime. My father has worked there himself." Ejnar knew all about it!

They must get home now. The sacks were good and heavy, they had to drag them along the ground; fortunately the snow was firm and slippery. In North Frihavn Road a policeman stopped them and wanted to know what was in the sacks, and where they were taking it. "We have been to the corner buying coal for our mother," said Ejnar brazenly; "we are just going round to Grenaa Street." So they were allowed to run on.

About seven they were back home; Old Rasmussen was dressing the two babies. "You walk by yourself, I gather—just like the big goslings!" she said with a sneer.

Peter grew red right out into his ears. "I've only been out picking coals," he said. "There's nothing wrong in that, is there?"

"You'll come to something, I bet—and me going on here worrying about you. I thought the Evil One himself had flown off with you."

He gulped his food and cleared out to get away from the scolding; Ejnar was waiting in the yard for him.

Peter was already quite blasé with regard to the school; it did not offer that excitement which his boy's soul craved for. There were kind teachers who let the milk-boys, who had been early up, sleep during the first lesson; and there were others who could not bear a boy to laugh. There was not much excitement to be got out of that.

But at this time something exciting happened after all; some dentists visited all schools to examine the children's teeth!

"It's because we are so thin," Peter explained at home. And that was quite right, they could read about it in the papers: The school authorities had noticed with alarm a progressive state of under-nourishment of the pupils of Communal Schools. And as there was reason to assume a certain connection between under-nourishment of poor children and bad teeth, the State had appointed a couple of dentists to examine and repair the children's teeth. They proved to be in a perfectly wretched condition. But all the blame did not rest with the bad condition of the masticating apparatus—the preparation of the food also played a part. Especial importance should be attached to the proper cooking of the food when the teeth were in a bad condition. So the question of introducing cooking as a school subject for girls was now under consideration; most poor people were downright dunces with regard to the preparation of food.

Peter and Ejnar could testify to this from their

own experience; it happened only too often that there was not even an attempt made at cooking in their homes. Well, the question of cooking was not yet very pressing; for Peter it would have practical significance only when sister Anna began school; until then he must try to manage as best he could. But the two boys were anxious to see whether all school children would be presented each with a toothbrush. Ejnar, who was generally not very regular in his attendance at school, turned up every day.

Today Peter went home from school via Great King Street, where his mother was washing. If he was lucky enough to come while she was having her meal he would get something—rissoles! The gentry never had anything but rissoles; wherever he visited his mother when she was washing they had rissoles and potatoes in white sauce. Peter sympathized with their taste—if he were rich he wouldn't eat anything else. But Cabman Olsen's wife, when she went out washing, always said: You needn't bother about giving me rissoles and potatoes in white sauce —I've had that the last two hundred places I've been washing! She was so difficult to please in the way of food; and the gentry only applied to her when there was nobody else to be had!

The mother was having her dinner when he arrived—rissoles and potatoes, hurrah! She sat crouching on the washing bench; really poorly did she look! Peter went up and put his arm round

her shoulders; he often did that—when nobody was watching. Under the big copper the fire boomed; it was delightfully warm down here. Clear beads of perspiration stood on the mother's forehead.

"It is good of you to come and see me, sonny," she said, holding out the plate to him. He attacked the food greedily.

"Mother, we're having tooth-brushes at school!" he said suddenly, his mouth bulging with food.

"Are you, sonny? That's all right; then the teeth'll get something to do," she said quietly.

"For we havn't got enough flesh on our bones, and that's because of our bad teeth." Ditte smiled faintly at his babble but did not reply. "It is really!" he repeated.

"Will you tell Old Rasmussen I shall be late home tonight," she said wearily as he was leaving. "There is such a lot of washing today. She'll find something or other for your supper." So she set to rubbing again, and Peter went home.

"The girls have to learn cooking at school, and we're all to have tooth-brushes!" he shouted gleefully as he stormed in.

"You're bringing a lot of draught with you," Old Rasmussen admonished him. She was not so fond of him since he started school. He was a good boy —in a way; but he was getting somewhat independent.

"It's true!" said Peter, repeating the whole story.

"All right; I'll believe you, though many wouldn't," said the old woman.

"You never believe anything," said Peter, vexed. "I shan't believe anything you tell me."

"Me believe that tale? I'm not such a fat-head. You trot your tale off to the country—tell it to those who take off their ears and use them for spoons when they eat their porridge."

"But the school Inspector said so himself. Do you think he's telling lies?"

The old woman found it expedient to beat a retreat. "Ah well, I shouldn't be surprised if they did take to tooth-brushes and cooking—when the devil spits he'll spit heaps!"

Peter was again hungry and sat down with the others; he was always ready for a meal. When they had finished the old woman put on her clothes to go to the District Office. She took Anna with her, so Peter had only Baby Brother to look after. That was enough.

It usually went off quite well, Peter had looked after the two babies so often. But today Baby Brother wanted to be carried the whole time. He was teething and kept his finger in his mouth; the little gums were quite swollen. Peter carried him about, to the window to let him look out, and back again to the table where his toys lay; but the baby could find no rest. As soon as Peter sat down with him he took to bellowing. That meant walking him

about again. Uncle Karl had been out fishing during the night and needed a peaceful sleep.

Peter was worn out; the baby slipped down further and further, he was on the point of losing him. He struggled out into the kitchen with him and shut the door so that the child's yelling should not be heard. But it was too cold out there, the baby was quite blue. In the end Peter did not know what on earth to do, so he began to blubber himself.

Karl came out to them. "It's a beautiful concert you two have got up," he said merrily, and dragged them back into the warm room. It did not take him long to put the little one in a good mood. "Why didn't you call me, Peterkin?" he asked.

"No, I can manage alone," replied Peter shortly. He felt ashamed at his fiasco. Karl noticed it.

"You're a downright nib," said he. "I don't understand how on earth you manage to drag that heavy kid about." That helped!

Ejnar came up. "May Peter come down into the yard to play?" he asked, pushing inside the door. He was a closely built little chap with a charmingly frank face—but oh, so snotty!

Peter shook his head and made signs to him. "Old Rasmussen isn't in," he said, full of responsibility.

"You clear out," laughed Karl. "Don't you think I can manage Baby Brother?"

Like a land-slide the two urchins went down the

stairs. Ejnar shot through the porch towards Adel Street, where he stood waiting at the corner. He was afraid somebody might have seen him and call him back; nobody could bear seeing him without wanting to send him on an errand. "Now we'll go larking," said he, happy to have escaped. "Out on the Seas!" Peter followed him blindly. Only when they reached Peace Bridge did he recollect that he had promised his mother something or other in this connection—what, he was not quite clear over. And there lay the ice before him; it was too late now!

"The ice is unsafe!" it said on placards along the sea; but they did not take much notice—placards and warnings were made to rob one of something good. They jumped down and slid away from the shore.

Some distance out they heard shouts from the shore—a policeman stood there, threatening and beckoning. Peter wanted to turn back. "Are you daft?" said Ejnar, running toward Queen Louise Bridge. The policeman kept pace with them on land; then he came out on the ice. Peter yelled as he ran: "Mother, mother!" "Oh shut up!" cried Ejnar, taking him by the hand; they were making for the opposite shore. Another policeman came lumbering from that side to catch them; but he was too heavy in the boots. They got up on the slopes of Black Pond and rushed through a lane out into Ryes Street. Near the Sea Pavillion they appeared once more, still racing and holding each other by

the hand; there they stopped with a sudden pull-up, like a pair of runaway horses. O-ooh!" cried Peter. "Look at me!" He was sweating and his cheeks were red.

There was nothing called unsafe ice here. All this end of the Sea was fenced off and decorated with Christmas trees, and hundreds of smartly dressed people were skating, or being pushed in sledges—to the tunes of a brass band. They all had fur caps and fur-trimmed clothes, and the ladies bristled with a muff on one hand, and they had cheeks like the reddest of apples. Peter had never before seen skating. "Oh look, he's flying!" he cried, pointing out a skater. "He's only touching ground with one toe!" The point now was how to get down.

"Can I strap your skates for you?" Ejnar asked a young lady dressed in squirrel who was sitting near the shore struggling to get her skates on.

"Thank you very much!" she said—and he was there on the instant. Peter stared for a moment, then he too was on the other side the fence. A keeper came up to them.

"They are helping me—they are my body-guard," the young lady said. He touched his cap politely and walked away.

The lady made a short run, and then she came back and took them round to a small stall. She ordered chocolate for them, scalding hot, with two rolls for each. When they had finished they walked out on the ice hand in hand to look at the skaters.

Their young lady was holding a young gentleman by the hand; they looked as if they were playing "saw, saw wood." They stopped by the boys and Peter put his hand into the lady's. "They are my knights!" she explained to her companion and patted their cheeks. He laughed and gave Peter a twenty-five öre piece.

They had better get out now; the keeper had his eye on the two urchins the whole time. They walked in across Raadhus Place. "I say, can't we buy something for the twenty-five öre?" said Ejnar, suddenly stopping at a baker's shop. "I'm ever so hungry."

No, Peter must save that to buy a new sewing machine for his mother. "But we'll go out to the Samaritan!" Peter also was hungry.

When they had been to the Samaritan they made for the Main Railway Station to see if there was a chance of making another 25 öre piece; it did happen that a traveller wanted his bag brought to the car. "But no old ladies," said Ejnar; "they never give anything. They merely say: Thank you, thank you so much!"

A stout gentleman was crossing Vesterbro with his bag. "He's a good 'un!" whispered Ejnar, and the two boys ran up to him, one on each side. He took their measure for a moment, then he handed the bag to them; they only barely managed to drag

*The fashionable shopping street in Copenhagen.

it along. He went by their side, wiping the perspiration from his neck and face. "Well I'm damned! I call you real boys!" he said admiringly.

He gave them a whole krone, and Ejnar put it in his pocket. By the Bristol they turned the revolving doors half a dozen times for people that came and went. But they got nothing; people took it as a matter of course, they didn't even look at them. And then they were again hungry.

"I say, shan't we buy something for the krone?" said Peter.

Ejnar put his tongue in his cheek: "Aye, you'd like that, I bet!" But a moment later he went into a baker's shop and came out with a bag full of sweet biscuits. And suddenly they discovered it was late—they must get home!

They made their way through Ströget*—to get just a glimpse of the shops.

And there they stuck on the grating outside a toy-shop, forgetting both time and place. They had their faces pressed against the pane, devouring the gorgeous display with greedy eyes in which the light from the shop glinted and was reflected. They steamed with eagerness, their hot breath bedewed the window so that they had to change positions continuously.

"Do look," said Peter. "There's a real engine! I'll have that!" Ejnar insisted it was his—he'd seen it first; for a moment they were on the point

of flying at each other's throats for the sake of the things in there.

"If I can have the engine you can have the big house with the horses and cows," Peter implored.

And Ejnar was easy-going. "But then I want the two rocking-horses as well!" said he. "I must have those!"

Again they had got each other by the hand and were sharing the toys—this time distributing them among the sisters and brothers at home. They must have some of them, even if they weren't here! Suddenly the light in the shop went out. "Whatever was that?" they said laughing, and looked at each other in surprise—was it all a dream? But down the street all the lights were extinguished, window after window went to sleep. It was closing time, the iron shutters rattled down before the windows, iron doors closed the entrances. Peter began to cry.

"You silly ass, it's early closing," said Ejnar. But Peter continued to yell, making for home at a gallop.

"Do you get a thrashing when you come home?" Ejnar made another attempt. "Say you've been an errand for somebody far out at Fredriksberg—you've got the twenty-five öre piece."

No, Peter didn't anticipate a thrashing, and didn't want to tell a lie. It was only that he felt sorry.

But at home the best quilt was hanging across a chair near the stove to get aired: Uncle Karl had

got it out! And the mother had not yet come home; Old Rasmussen was alone with Baby Brother —Sister Anna had disappeared.

"Yes, she's gone off, the silly brat," the old woman admitted awkwardly. "Couldn't you slip down and look for her?"

In that moment Ditte returned, deadly weary and feeling bad. "Leave it for tonight," she said, flopping down on the bed. "She's only gone to Granny at Nyboder as usual. Let her stay over night—she likes it so much." Ditte was only longing to get everybody to bed so that she might rest, really rest; tomorrow morning they would go and fetch the little girl home.

Soon after they were all asleep. Peter dreamed he was turning revolving doors incessantly; for every turn a krone dropped down from above. He was buying sewing machines with all the money. And no sooner had he bought them than they were taken away again.

CHAPTER XV.

MOTHER DITTE IN THE PAPERS.

DITTE had slept too long, she was tired from yesterday. They had all overslept, Old Rasmussen, Peter, and Baby Brother. They had probably been too comfortable, the good quilt had put everything straight once more. The under-quilt was put back under the old woman again, and Ditte and the children no longer slept on the bare mattress. It was delightful, but it made for laziness.

"It will be so nice," said Ditte, "when we get all our things out of pawn." Existence loomed up one shade brighter when Karl earned some money; if only she could keep up her health!

Today she herself made Peter ready for school; he needed an occasional thorough inspection—generally he got out of it far too easy. She spoke to the old woman about Anna; Granny would be dressing her now; when Peter had gone Ditte would go and fetch her. It would be early enough—the old widow stayed in bed late in the morning.

Cabman Olsen's wife came in with the paper. "I was wondering if this is about your little girl," she said, and began reading about a three or four years

old child that had been picked up yesterday in Klerke Street and brought to the Police Station in Great King Street. The police asked through the papers that the parents, or any other person who was in a position to give information, should apply to the Police Station. "For of course they think the child has no parents," said Cabman Olsen's wife spitefully, "that's why they say 'any person who is able to give information.' For a moment I really thought of running out there myself."

Ditte said nothing, she stood staring into the air with a senseless smile which grew whiter and whiter. Then she sank quietly down on the floor. Driver Olsen's wife screamed—she did not feel so high in the hat now. "Don't stand there posing," said Old Rasmussen harshly, "go and get hold of some vinegar!" They bathed her temples and brought her round. She sat up. "It's that silly heart," she said, and looked round with a dazed expression. Suddenly reality dawned on her, and she rushed out exactly as she was—up to Great King Street.

The child was not at the Station, the old woman from Nyboder had been to fetch her. "A sweet little kiddie," said the Inspector, "she has slept here in the guard-room all night. A dear little thing. How the devil could you—?" He probably knew the whole affair—he did not finish the question, at any rate. But it was a serious case.

Ditte had to give a report of herself; she had to tell everything, that she herself was illegitimate, and

that she had two children not born in wedlock. All that she had hidden so carefully, the whole record of her family and her sins, was unveiled and put down in a book. She had never in her life been so far down; she burned with shame while she was being questioned, and she was on the verge of tears. There she was, put down among all the rest—in the criminal register; she who had never had anything to do with the police!

At last they let her go and she went out to Nyboder to fetch the little girl. She carried her home, clasping her closely and crying. "Anna has been to Granny; Anna slept with p'licemen," the girl kept repeating.

"Yes, yes, you're a big girl," replied Ditte sobbing.

In her own street they turned and looked at her, and in the buildings the tenants came out on the stairs—she certainly created a stir. She hurried up to her own flat and locked the door behind her. Old Rasmussen was using bad language—at herself for not looking properly after the lass, and at everybody else for making such a fuss over the matter. "Don't you take it to heart so," she said. "If one were to shed tears for all people say about one, one would be crying buckets. We've got Little Anna back, and next time we'll look better after her. But it's a silly habit running off like that—it's almost like a vice."

Ditte understood that vice. She remembered

from her own childhood what it meant to be allowed to sleep with Granny for one night only; nothing in the world could make up for a Granny. And the running away in itself she knew, even if she was long since beyond the pull of the unknown. She herself had run off aimlessly when she was a child; and the boys—especially Kristian—how often had they disappeared from home? Poor children must miss so much—perhaps that was the reason?

She did not do anything; the whole morning she sat with Anna on her lap speaking softly to her. A strange calm had fallen over Ditte; she had the feeling that Peter and Anna would now be taken from her. At any time she might expect the authorities to come and look into her affairs and remove the children. Every time she heard steps on the stairs she began to tremble.

"Don't you fret," said Old Rasmussen, "nobody'll rob a body of kids. That's the only thing in this world that's safe against thieves."

Gradually Ditte pulled herself together and began to think about dinner; when Peter returned he was generally famished. There he was, storming up the stairs long before she had expected him; time must have run away from her again! He held a tooth-brush in his hand, a real standard one; even Old Rasmussen had to admit that it was a tooth-brush, so help her!

"It's downright wonderful," she said. "How often I've lost the better part of my dinner in my

hollow teeth! With a thing like that you get the whole lot down." Peter kept his brush in his fist while he ate.

About two o'clock the midday papers arrived with a new stir. One of them had been to the police and got Ditte's address, and made a great shout about it. *An Unnatural Mother,* they headed the article. The paper even printed something that was meant to be her portrait—the readers must be shown what the Unnatural Mother looked like. Ditte broke down entirely; the name Unnatural Mother fell on her as a crushing blow, she was unable to bear the reproach and shame it contained. She lay curled up on the bed and sobbed, neither Old Rasmussen nor the children could give her any comfort. She was talking the whole time—talking and sobbing; she defended and accused herself, defended and accused. Peter went quietly up to her and put his tooth-brush into her hand. "You can have it," he said. It fell out of her hand onto the floor; he tiptoed up and took it back, almost greedily.

Fru Langhalm came in with cakes in a bag. She went straight up to Ditte and kissed her on the forehead. "I wanted to tell you that we are on your side, my husband and I," she said. "It is disgraceful the way you are being treated. My husband wants to protest in the papers tomorrow morning, or speak to the police." That gave Ditte a little courage, and she got up and began to look after her home.

In the afternoon Karl came home; he was hoarse as a crow and could scarcely speak. "You've got properly in the lime-light," he whispered. When he saw how heavily she had taken it he grew serious. He made her tell him exactly what had happened.

"It almost makes one believe that the whole machinery has nothing to do but lie in wait watching for an opportunity to seize upon a poor woman," she cried. "It doesn't enter anybody's head to try to understand how it all happened—not to mention helping one."

"You see, according to their opinion we paupers are only people with criminal tendencies, and heaven made it their duty to look after us," said Karl bitterly. "An occurrence like this is a godsend for them; it gives them an opportunity to wallow in the almost criminal offence of poverty. But why take it so to heart? Let the papers drivel about the lack of human kindness and the missing sense of duty. If I were you I should be proud to have the whole pack after me. I should—" his voice disappeared altogether.

"You poor thing, what a cold you have got," exclaimed Ditte in alarm. "Hurry up and get into Old Rasmussen's bed, and I'll make you some herb-tea."

But Karl insisted on going to his own room. "I don't think I can go out tonight," he whispered.

So there he lay steaming, with a hot stone at his feet and Ditte's old shawl round his throat. The

children ran to and fro between the flat and his room. "Do leave Uncle Karl in peace," said Ditte.

A moment later they were at him again. "He doesn't mind it!" they said.

"Did he say so?"

"Well—he didn't turn us out, at any rate! He's lying there talking to the ceiling—it's ever so funny."

Ditte hurried round to him. Karl lay with flushed face and shiny eyes. "If you wrap yourself well up in oilskins you'll manage all right," he whispered into the air. He did not see her.

Karl's cold gave Ditte something more useful to think about than a couple of silly newspaper articles; she read the papers with a calm mind the next day. They no longer occupied themselves with her person; it was the social side of the affair they had taken up now. One paper demanded that neglect of children that were entrusted to the care of a person should be punished, be the person rich or poor; another paper wrote beautifully of the urgent need for enlightenment for the lower classes.

Ditte did not understand them. But she understood more today than previously; the occurence had sown rancor in her heart, bitterness against those sheltered and comfortable beings who directed their blows downwards.

The police did not visit her. Teacher Langhalm had seen them and gone surety for her. But the

Welfare Committee appeared at last—and returned for several days. Smartly dressed ladies that smelled of scent, gentlemen that smelled of office, the parson full of dignified benevolence. It was a very solemn performance, so solemn that Ditte thought: They'll take the children away; and dreaded the approaching calamity.

"Pooh!" said Old Rasmussen. "They'll take nothing, they won't! Do you think they're keen to get a couple of hungry kids to worry about as long as there's a chance to avoid it? It's all a pose—like everything else in that line!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WOOLEN VEST.

OLD RASMUSSEN'S prophesy came true: Ditte was graciously permitted to keep the children. But she had been given a real fright, and for two or three weeks after the affair the Welfare Committee kept calling at the buildings, questioning the other women about Ditte's management of the children. It was no joke!

Karl's cold took more time than any of them had anticipated. He was feverish both day and night, and for a while it seemed as if his lungs were affected. But then the illness took a sudden turn for the better, and there was no immediate danger now. There was no more need for Ditte to watch over him during the night. But he required good nursing, the fever had taken most of his strength. A good thing it was that he was on the mend.

The best quilt had gone off to the pawn-shop again; it couldn't stand to be at home very long at a time. But they did enjoy it when it was with them. There was something strange about the quilt running off in this manner so often; the rest of the bedclothes kept quietly at home—fortunately. The

quilt resembled Sister; yet Ditte did not understand it.

Sister did not run away now, for Peter was constantly by her side, with the tooth-brush clutched in his hand. It was never out of his left fist where it stuck as if glued to him; in the night he slept with it. He had never before been so crazy over a toy. He even took it to school, hiding it in his blouse when he was in the class room. He doted on it as a babe dotes on its pacifier.

In other respects he was sensible enough; Karl's illness had made quite a man of him. He provided them with fuel. "But do remember that I am not in," he said to Old Rasmussen before he went out, "or you'll be thinking I'm looking after Sister."

"I won't forget it," said the old woman as meekly as if he had been her boss. She was quite impressed with his dignity.

One day he came home with a krone—besides having a full sack; he had first gathered a sack-full and sold it to strangers. It was badly wanted, the krone was!

"We can do with more of that kind, there's room for lots of 'em!" said the old woman. She was in high spirits, despite illness and privation; she had had her relief money raised from ten to twelve kroner a month. It wasn't enough to make anyone rich, but it was money nevertheless. And she had taken up a new trade in her eightieth year, she made

fire-lighters for a factory in Adel Street. It was a small oil-shop really, but she called it factory because it sounded better. If she was very industrious she could earn a krone a week. She also scrubbed the stairs, so that Ditte could see to more important matters. "Thank God one doesn't eat one's food in vain," she said very proudly.

There was enough for Ditte to do. The more difficult the position—the more she must run about; times grew worse and worse. There was much more unemployment now than during the corresponding period of the previous year, and it increased daily. Neither was there any means of resisting it; last winter had plundered the homes, and the summer work did not last long enough to put people on their feet again. Collections were made among rich and poor; those that had work gave a quarter of their weekly wages to the unemployed. But it didn't amount to much as long as there were two men out of work for every one that was in. The collection among the well-to-do brought in considerable sums. But at the same time it was as if a devil of economy had taken possession of them. Many families which previously had used outside help for charring and washing and were not in the least affected by the bad times, suddenly decided to do without their charwoman. It was as if cold and misery made the minds contract even among persons who had no need to economize. Undercutting took place everywhere. If there was

a copper to be earned anywhere the unemployed turned up by the scores—bidding against each other until in the end they got scarcely anything for their work.

In the country districts they took up collections too. Out there food grew right from the soil; and the peasants gave generously, though usually they did not look kindly towards the capital. Big stores of bread and pork and potatoes arrived in town and were distributed by charitable institutions and Trade Unions. But here as everywhere else—those with the hardest elbows got nearest to the food; if a man had the devil for his uncle that too was a help. Old Rasmussen had difficulties in asserting herself, and so had Ditte. It was almost better to send Peter; he squeezed in between the legs of the grown-ups and was lucky enough occasionally to get hold of something. But it was only occasionally! However big the collections, and whatever they did—the effect was but slight; poverty was like a sieve, like a bottomless pit.

It was a good thing the doctor did not ask a fee. He came every day to look at Karl, although he knew he would never get a red cent. He knew Karl from the meetings, so there was something good coming from them after all! Ditte was frightened of him. He was thin as a pole and looked as if he had lived on a bird's rations for many years; it could hardly be a paying game to side with the poor. He was really all eyes, but those had a bite in them;

they gleamed like pin-points behind his spectacles and made one feel quite nervous. When he said something she was never sure that he didn't mean the exact opposite.

But Old Rasmussen was not so timid, she tackled him boldly: couldn't he write down something for this ailment and for that—preferably stuff with some power in it.

"I can easily write down something," he said with his pale smile—"But that won't do you much good —unless you swallow the prescription, as they do in Catholic countries."

"Oh, no, I'm not a Catholic, praise heaven," the old woman replied quickly—"There's nothing the matter with my head. It's the loins, and my poor old legs, and the shoulder joints. I'm thinking maybe there's something left in a bottle, a drop that'll be thrown away in any case."

"Do you think people throw anything away—in times like these?"

"I was thinking someone might die perhaps. I don't care what it is as long as it's got the power in it."

He laughed at that; but next day he brought something after all, both pills and mixture. "Let her take it," he said to Ditte—"Old persons need a pick-me-up. And we'll let Karl get up for a moment the day after tomorrow. But he must have a warm woollen vest next to the body, so we shan't run any risks. Can you see to that? Two—so as to have

a change; under no circumstances must he leave it off again."

Oh yes, Ditte would see to that. She said so without turning a hair, but in reality she did not know how on earth to manage it. The quilt had gone to pay for medicine, there was nothing left to pawn, she had borrowed and gone on tick wherever she could—the illness had exhausted all her resources. It was with the utmost effort she managed to obtain for him what little food he could get down.

She fried a small piece of liver for Karl for dinner; the others had potatoes and brown sauce. When she brought him his food he was reading. "What delicious food you give me," he said in high spirits; but he only pecked at it and had to force every morsel down. Thin as a stick he had grown during these few weeks—it was sad to see how he had gone off.

"Now you must eat," she said. "You scarcely touch the food."

"I shall be all right when I get out of bed again; staying in bed takes it out of open-air people like me. Tomorrow I shall get up!"

"No, not until the day after tomorrow," said Ditte with a faint smile. "You want to cheat me—you are just like a child."

"When the doctor says the day after tomorrow you may be sure it means tomorrow. They are always so careful."

"We must get hold of a woollen vest for you first; you must not get up without it."

"I shall have to stay in bed for a long time then —where on earth can we take it from? And what do I want it for? I've never in my life had wool next to my body!"

Ditte did not wish to speak any more about it; the vest he *must* have, wherever she should take it from. "What are you reading?" she asked in surprise. "Is it the Bible?"

"Yes, I am reading Isaiah's judgment on the society of his time; I did not quite understand him before, but he also was looking for the God of widows and the fatherless. Hear what he says:

Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed; to turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless!

"Is it not as if he was thundering against our society?"

"He can't have thundered in the right way," said Ditte, "seeing that we still have to fight against it all."

"No, he put his trust in the *Lamb,* but a lamb can never drive away wolves. I believe that Christ was too lenient, and that we suffer for it now. It takes sharp ointment to cure such a scurvy head as is our world. Oh how I wish I might live to see the ful-

filment of the judgment!" He was quite fanatic and his eyes burned.

"Now lie down and stop reading," said Ditte and took the Bible from him. "You'll get feverish again."

When they had eaten Old Rasmussen made ready to go out. She was going to the Benefit Society to try to get a piece of pork; there was a distribution of food-stuffs today. "Karl can do with some soup," she said—"a good spoonful of peasoup."

"Do take Sister," said Ditte—"then Peter can look after Baby Brother. I must see about that woollen vest."

"You ought to try Isted Street," the old woman suggested. "When they hear it is for Karl—"

Ditte had had the same idea. "But hurry up mother, or you'll be too late." She pushed them out through the door.

She hurried up to get herself ready. "You'll be a good boy and look well after Baby Brother," she said and cupped her hand round Peter's chin as a good-bye. "But try not to go in to Uncle Karl; he is too tired to have you." Peter rubbed his muzzle in her hollow hand like an affectionate foal. "We'll be good boys," he murmured solemnly . "Mother needn't worry!"

In Goters Street Ditte met a man who was selling the unemployed's paper; she bought a copy to take home to Karl. Then she thought that he would

probably like to see it at once and hurried back. She came into his room out of breath—Peter was there. "What, are you here?" she exclaimed looking at him.

"I only wanted—" he said, but then he grew silent and followed his mother back. The baby sat on his cushion on the floor playing; two chairs, forming a triangle, had been put in front of the stove so that he could not get near it; it was all very sensibly arranged. "But I would rather you didn't leave him," said Ditte. "And you did promise!"

"It was my legs that ran off with me—I couldn't help it!" said Peter ashamed.

"Don't let your legs run off with you next time," said Ditte and kissed him.

At Lars Peter's things were in a bad way, they hadn't a penny in the house. "Hjalmar had father's last money," said Sine—"he borrowed it to go home to Næstved. He was going home to get some money out of his old man—his people are well off. We are just as poor as you!"

Ditte did not believe that; they had goods piled up everywhere. But of course—if the stock couldn't be made into money it wasn't worth much.

"They have been running you in the papers," said Sine pointedly. "We are quite proud to be your relatives."

"But some of the papers wrote quite nicely about the lass," said Lars Peter. "And it isn't everybody that gets into the papers with portrait and all. I've

got the paper here—it's a scream the way they've rigged you out; it isn't easy to recognize you." He dug down into his breast pocket.

But Ditte was not anxious to go more closely into that affair—she had had enough of the newspapers. Neither did she feel there was anything to be proud of.

"But there are many that side with you," said Lars Peter.

So she could have saved herself that trouble! And she had looked forward so much to coming home with a thick, warm woollen vest and putting it on Karl. His poor frame was so wasted after the illness, how should he be able to keep warm? He himself was very cheerful, but congestion of the lungs was no joking matter.

When she came into her room little Georg sat quietly on the floor playing with the tooth-brush. Peter had given it to him to keep him quiet, and he himself sat next to the baby with his legs tied together. He had tied them up with Ditte's clothes-line—twining it round and round so that they could hardly get them free again.

"I did that so they shouldn't make me run away from Baby Brother again," he said seriously. Ditte had to sit down, she felt a stitch through her heart —this time of joy.

Old Rasmussen and Sister came home, very exhausted but happy nevertheless. They had got a piece of streaky pork and four pounds of potatoes.

"Look how beautifully streaky it is," said the old woman. "If we'd only had a handful of peas we'd have made peasoup with pork for Karl, he could do with a decent meal." Poor old thing—she was mad for a decent meal herself! The older she grew —the more greedy for food she became.

Ditte was staring into the void; she was thinking about the peas—and appeared to be searching the entire universe. Then she returned to earth—with empty hands. "Would you be sorry to lend mother your twenty-five öre?" she asked Peter. The boy did not answer but began to dig into the lining of his coat—it wasn't htere! Then he suddenly remembered where it was and pulled it out from behind a piece of wallpaper that had loosened. He gave it to the mother quietly. So now also Peter's hope of a new sewing machine was dashed; Ditte had given up hope long ago.

She went to Karl's door, but he was asleep—his room was in darkness. All the better; then she would not have to enter with empty hands. He pretended to be quite comfortable in the clothes he had got, but that was in order to spare her. He had not spared himself; he had got her things out of pawn and given her money when he earned anything —instead of getting a set of oilskins for himself. And there he lay, as a reward for kindness! He *must* have some warm under-clothes—if she had to steal them.

Ditte helped the old woman with the peasoup.

Old Rasmussen couldn't manage to lift the huge iron pot that must be put on the fire today in honour of the pork! Then she went out again—to see about the vest.

CHAPTER XVII.

A MEETING.

IT is difficult to find a pin in a haystack; to find five kroner in a town of half a million inhabitants is often still more difficult. Ditte could testify to the truth of that saying; she had been trapesing about for a couple of hours with no result. The people she knew were just as poor as herself—and begging was no good; she had tried even that. There were probably too many beggars; people wouldn't even be bothered to listen to her story about the woollen vest, but hurried away.

At Nytorv she met Marianne. "Can you tell me where to get five kroner—for a vest for Karl?" she asked miserably. "He has had congestion of the lungs and *must* have a woollie." Marianne shook her head.

"Earn 'em," she said—"I know of no other way. Down by the quay—"

Ditte walked on—across Halmtorvet towards Isted Street; she would try Lars Peter once more. But, after all, when she stood outside their door she had not the courage to accept the refusal anew —from Sine's mouth.

In the dark side streets leading out to Vesterbro Street the women walked up and down. They did not venture into Vesterbro Street because of the police, but stood lurking in the shadow where the side street ran out, ultimately dragging their victims away. They were warmly dressed, they had heavy furs and muffs. It was a long time since Ditte's furs had gone!

"Pst, my dear—come along!" Ditte heard the sentence but did not know where it came from. Did it come from herself?

A man turned round quickly, on the point of saying something, but stopped silent. It was Vang.

"Do I meet you here?" he said and looked at her with a strange expression. The blood rushed into Ditte's head.

"And I you?" she replied, her eyes gleaming with wrath.

"I did not mean to hurt you," he said and put out his hand. "It was only that I could scarcely realize it was you."

"Of course it's I—who else should it be?" said Ditte brazenly. "Perhaps you thought it was your wife?" she laughed disdainfully.

Vang did not reply—she felt she had hit him. But he deserved it if he thought that she was that sort—that this was how she earned her living. "You have mistaken us two before this," she added. "But perhaps you are tired of home life, seeing you

are sniffing about here?" She knew quite well that he had no such business here, the very way he walked showed that. But there was revenge and satisfaction in pretending she believed it. Rage, hate and despair seethed in her; she wanted him to believe the worst about her—just him. She felt a queer satisfaction in being coarse, wanton and harsh of voice. "Pst, my dear! Come home with me!" she cried into his face with a coarse voice and laughed.

Vang listened in silence and with a feeble smile. Then he put out his hand. "Do stop it," he begged. "You are only doing it to hurt me—Ditte!" He looked kindly into her eyes—beseechingly.

"Of course I do it to hurt you, what else? And you immediately got a bad conscience—you thought it was your fault I was dragging in the mire. You can safely confess! Oh no, it's only in the novels these things happen. Life isn't as touching as you make it out. Do you think I look like women in that profession? I should need to be better dressed, I'm afraid. Men don't like rags—neither do you authors! Not like this, at any rate."

"Do stop it," he said, and put his arm under hers. "Shall we walk along the street? I have to speak at eight o'clock, so I have plenty of time."

"Oh yes, in the *Hall;* I believe I saw it in the paper. You are going to preach at us who are lying in the dirt, tell us how to behave so as not to get too soiled in our misery. You are so edifying, they say.

Can you really be bothered still to have anything to do with us?" She put a peculiar emphasis on the last words.

"Ditte, is it really your opinion that I am a hypocrite?" he asked, looking at her sadly.

"I don't know," Ditte dismissed him, "neither do I care a scrap. You go on moralizing if you find it pays. As far as I care you can preach our ears full and sponge on us—all of you. I am totally indifferent!"

"Come with me to the *Hall,* then you will be able to judge for yourself whether I am a hypocrite."

"No—I'm going home to the kids."

"You are married?"

She laughed derisively. "It's possible to have kids without that. I have four—and a sweetheart who's lying at home waiting for me to bring him something."

"I have no money, Ditte," said Vang in a low voice, "but I shall get fifteen kroner for my lecture. You can have them. I will send it on to you if you have not got time to wait."

"Thanks, I've got no address," replied Ditte—"I'm to be found on the streets between eight and twelve in the evening."

He gave her his hand—he wanted to be rid of her now. Her throat burned with rage and with the injustice she had suffered, with the wish to humiliate him and herself and all the world, with desperate

shame that he should believe anything bad of her. "You have all exploited me—each in his own way. There is not one among you who have not taken advantage of me," she broke out in almost a scream.

"Do you believe I would exploit you, Ditte—do you believe it?" Vang asked.

"Certainly not," she replied harshly—"you needn't pose! I'm no seduced innocent. But why did you lift me up to the light, and then let me drop again? You don't know how disgusting it is to be down here when once one has had a glimpse of something better. But now I want to be rid of you, do you hear—let me go!" Her voice was thick.

Without a good-bye she walked towards town. A moment later she turned and looked back; he stood there still stooping and looking after her. She began to run.

When Ditte had been running some distance her heart spoke in a most decisive manner, and she began to walk very slowly. Why she had run at all she no longer understood. Neither did she understand anything else—least of all that it was to Vang she had given the pure love of her youth, and her innocence—for she was innocent then! Dear Lord—he wasn't a real man! He stood there trembling with bad conscience—nobly shouldering his burden of guilt like the Theologist she saw in former days at the Baby Farm. She must have looked at him

through his wife's adoring eyes—her, she would like to meet again!

No, least of all did she understand herself—what a way to behave—like an hysterical female. Was it any wonder he believed that of her? And were those women worse than others? They were at any rate the only ones that got decently paid for their work!

Ditte doubted everything tonight—she seemed to find darkness wherever she looked. If she offered her life in return, nobody would give her even five Kroner for a woollen vest. And yet they exhorted one to bear up and be brave. She was deadly weary when she reached home.

Karl was in high spirits. "It's the peasoup and pork," he said—"I'm quite drunk!" He had indeed behaved like a drunk, he had pulled the bed out to the middle of the floor.

"You have been up," said Ditte alarmed.

"Yes, it's those damned rats—they began nibbling near the head of my bed—up there. And however much I knocked the wall they wouldn't stop it. Just listen, there they are again. Did you ever hear such impudence?"

They nibbled stubbornly at the wall where it sloped; the wallpaper moved. A hole appeared, something or other fell through and rolled along the floor. Ditte looked for it with the lamp—it was a two-öre! Another came, and another, there was

a rain of them. "It's Beard of Hearts' two-öre!" she exclaimed, staring at them in horror.

Karl leaped out of bed. He forgot cold and illness, he stood there in his shirt working at widening the hole. "Look!" he cried, pulling a cigar box through the hole—"do look here!" It was filled with corroded two-öres.

Ditte stared at the money, her face aquiver. "Now you can get your vest!" she attempted to smile, but weeping overwhelmed her. She sank down quite overcome; all the terrible suspense now found release.

"But that is nothing to cry for," said Karl putting his arm round her; for he did not know what she had suffered for the woollen vest.

She lay against him, her head on his breast, weeping softly; all her being was limp, all rigidity appeared to melt away in tears. Karl caressed her quietly, but kept silent; she must be allowed to have a good cry.

When she had calmed down he lifted her head. He put his hands round her ravaged face which tears had made melancholy, beautiful as a dewy autumn field, and looked into her eyes. "Now you have cried on my bosom—now you are mine," he said gravely. But in the depths of his eyes there was something that laughed; perhaps it was his heart. Ditte had to close her eyes.

She nestled down to him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DITTE TAKES A DAY OFF.

IT was fortunate that Karl got up again; for only a few days later came Ditte's turn.

One morning when Old Rasmussen came in she was still in bed. "Lor', are you ill?" she said in a panic. It had never happened before that she had been up before Ditte.

Ditte tried to smile: "I don't know what is the matter with me today, but I don't think I can get up. I have no strength at all."

"You stay in bed, my girl; it will do you good to have a rest for once," said the old woman.

Ditte lay there with a bad conscience. "It's a shame I should lie here lazing, but my legs are quite limp," she said in excuse. "Tomorrow I shall get up." But next day she looked still worse, and Karl forbade her to get up. "If you get up I shall fetch Doctor Torp," he said as a threat. And that was effective!

She must be in a bad way somehow or other, though she did not complain about pains anywhere; she took her fate calmly. Usually it was not Ditte's way to lie quiet and look at others working. "I

wonder if there isn't something busted in her," the old woman said to Karl.

Karl's illness and the strain of the fight to keep it all going had taken it out of Ditte; it was evident now how run down she was. She must be thoroughly worn out, for when she had been in bed for a couple of days looking at the others working, she left even the management to them—she who ordinarily felt she must do everything both for herself and others.

Karl pottered about making her comfortable. He was not strong enough to go on the water yet, and during the last few days the ice had also closed down the fishing; but the fisherman had kept his job open for him whilst he was in bed. "He's a capable man and would like me for his partner" said Karl. "He'll let me pay my share of the boat in work. So in the spring we can marry!"

Ditte smiled.

The spring, aye—it would soon be here. The days grew longer; but the winter grew more severe. Ice came down from the Baltic; Köge Bay was already half filled. But it was good in as much as it kept Karl at home; they would surely find their food now as always—they had not starved to death yet.

Through his acquaintance with the fishermen Karl obtained a little light work by giving them a hand down at Gammelstrand; but it was in the mornings only, they could not live by it. And he had no strength to chase about for casual jobs. One

day he stood fingering his Trade Union Book. "What are you thinking about?" asked Ditte.

"Oh, I was thinking of going to the Union this afternoon—there is a distribution."

"You shouldn't do that," said Ditte—"it won't be nice for you!"

"Pooh, when one isn't strong enough to work one can't be allowed to feel shy of begging," he said, with gallows' humor.

He came back with empty hands. He was not married—those with families had preference. "It is because I belong to the Opposition," he said bitterly. "We are always the last ones to be considered when there is a chance of work—they are trying to make us more humble."

"Let them keep their food, then," said Ditte unconcerned. "We'll be able to manage somehow. Tomorrow I shall get up!"

She said that every day, and when a week had elapsed Karl went up to his friend the Doctor and asked him to call. Torp examined her very thoroughly. "It is very sensible of you to take a holiday," he said when he had overhauled her. "I will write you down something you can have for a nip—something to hearten you."

Karl followed him down to the porch. "What is the matter with her?" he asked.

"Oh, everything and nothing—she is what we call worn out."

Karl looked at him in surprise.

"I tell you I have never seen a patient so thoroughly worn out—at least not at that age. Even the heart has gone phut—though I gather she has never been really ill. And that is usually the strongest muscle in our body. She must have had an uncommonly hard life."

"So she has," replied Karl in a low voice. "When do you think she can get up?"

"I am not sure she will get up again—in the best of cases it will take a long time. There is no definite point where a cure might be effected. You must let her rest; perhaps a rest will work miracles."

Karl set to at once and got her moved into the other room. There was more quiet, and the bed was better. "The doctor says she will soon be up again," said he to the old woman. "But she needs much rest; the children must not be with her—not in the night either."

"Thank heaven there's nothing serious the matter," said Old Rasmussen happily. "I really thought something had busted in her—the soul or something—the way she lies there so still, she that was always so brisk. I've heard of such cases before!"

Peter moved over to Karl in the box-room, and little Georg slept on two chairs. Old Rasmussen took over Sister. "It is downright nice," she said—"it keeps my loins warm!" Everything suited her.

The rest did work miracles in so far as Ditte became more cheerful. She relished lying in a broad,

soft bed sleeping—without having to watch in her sleep that somebody was covered up. "I used to lie like this when I was in service with the gentry," she said—"then I had my own bed with a spring mattress. But I was too young to appreciate it then."

She occupied herself largely with the past—she had time now. When Karl told her that she would soon be able to get up she smiled. He would buy a cottage near the Bottle Inn; there they would have the sea right at their feet, and it would not be far to go to Gammelstrand with the fish. "Then you will have to pick the herrings from the nets and mend them—like you did at the Hamlet!" he said. She lay listening to him, she did not assent, neither did she protest.

Mild she was, and so delicate; paler of hue from day to day—that was with lying in bed. Her lips were thick and blue; she would frequently complain of pains in the region of the heart.

But she was not good at taking medicine, Karl had to force her to it. Nevertheless it disappeared, it was Old Rasmussen that pinched a mouthful now and then! That amused them highly.

Ditte had proof now of her popularity. There was not one inhabitant of the building that had not been to see her. And they all brought something, however poor they were. "You are lying there like a queen giving audience," said Old Rasmussen. Fru Langhalm brought a roasted chicken and a glass of

wine, and the baker's wife brought a cake. It was a pleasure being ill in this way. Snotty little kiddies sneaked in from the passage when the door was open and came up to her bed with a sweet—a sticky sweet in a black little fist. These visits made her more happy than all the rest. On the table by the bed all the gifts were placed. Ditte had no appetite, so there was all the more for the children and Old Rasmussen; the four of them made quick work of the delicacies.

The old Ragpicker came every day. "And how's Mother Ditte getting on today?" he asked from the passage; he would not go in. He had taken to trembling of late and stooped a lot; for every day his legs grew more unsteady, he was dirtier and more miserable. His memory was also on the wane; just after he had asked once, he would come asking again. "He's in his second childhood," said Old Rasmussen. "Poor old thing!" It sounded so funny; she was half a score years older than he.

She was certainly not in her second childhood. She planned and arranged; with her eighty years she planted herself in the midst of the daily strife. The past she did not trouble about. She had not had an easy time, many things pointed to that. But she never mentioned it; Ditte did not even know where her children were. "If they aren't dead they'll be still alive!" was all she replied—to this question as to everything connected with her past life. She knew more useful occupations that the

raking up of that which could not be altered after all.

During this period Ditte herself would survey her own experiences and misfortunes—she had time now, for the first time in her life. "I think I am going to die," she said—"I recollect so many strange things. When people are going to die they do that." It was strange that people should already have persecuted her before she was born! They had never been very enthusiastic about her, but at that time they had actual designs on her life. That was strange, for they did not even know what she would be like. It was due to poverty! And Granny's death, and Sörine's fading away in prison —that also was due to poverty. "I wonder if everything evil is due to poverty?" she said to Karl.

"Most of it is, at any rate," he replied definitely. "If we could get rid of need and misery the world would look different."

"Children are not evil, anyway," said Ditte ponderingly. "There was a time when I was severe with the little ones and punished them if something went to pieces—because it was so difficult to replace. But if they break a nice cup that cost a krone—and one has got the krone—one has merely to buy another. What then becomes of the crime? It is sad to be poor."

"But as children are not evil, how is it we become evil when we grow up?" she continued.

"I suppose grown-ups are not evil either," said

Karl. "Isn't it circumstances that force us to evil acts?"

"Yes, I am evil. Sometimes I hate you all and think nothing is worth while. When you were ill I dreamed you could get well again if I would give my life for you; they were going to turn it into a woollen vest for you—did you ever hear such nonsense! But I wouldn't give it."

"But I have done you more harm than anybody else," said Karl.

"You have?" Ditte looked at him in surprise. It had often annoyed her that he was so unassailably kind in everything he did; she was glad of it now—for the sake of the old woman and the children. They would be well looked after. And she herself—well, the fact that she slipped into death by his hand was a justification for her, she thought.

"Do you think it bad of me not to be sorry to leave you all?" she asked one day.

Karl shook his head. "Isn't there anyone at all you are sorry to leave?" he asked with a faint hope.

Ditte considered for awhile. "Yes, little Peter," she said finally. "He could teach one to be good."

"Wouldn't you like to see how big Jens is now?" asked Karl. "Shall I fetch him?"

No, why do that—Ditte did not even know him now. There were enough strange children in here to enjoy. "Those tears have dried," she explained. "I believe it is all the same whether one is the mother of a child or not. The main point is that

one should live with it and be responsible for it. The being you live with and are responsible for you will also love."

"Yes, and as you take the responsibility for everything you grow to love us all," said Karl and kissed her.

"But I don't take the responsibility for anything now," replied Ditte. "I won't have it."

"Because you are tired. But now you must rest and regain your strength—remember you are young yet, only twenty-five years."

"Is that all—yes, so it is!" Ditte laughed happily. "Do you know, I have been feeling like an old woman—with all I have been through. I believe I am used up—I must be melted down like the old rubber goloshes. When I think of myself as a little one, running along by Granny's hand, or sitting with her reading—it seems an eternity ago. How the time has been long and slow, Karl! And Hill Farm and the Crow's-Nest—how long ago it all is."

"But then you have lived an active life—you have never been lazing your time away! And you have met with a lot of adversity—you have never had a really good time. But now you shall have a good time, I promise you that."

"Yes, I shall have a good time now. I have a good time already—I have somehow moved into another world where there are no duties. There is no call on me, can you understand that? For the

children are still there and need looking after—dear little things that have shown me only kindness. It is as if everything is put into other hands. No, do you know what it is? It is as if poverty was abolished! Ah, if poverty could only be got rid of! Do you think it could be abolished? Are they really attempting to do it? Is Pelle doing anything?"

"Yes, he has just brought forward a proposal for Communal Creches," said Karl. "They are to be controlled by physicians, and everything is to be up-to-date with steam-laundry and sterilized milk. The children are to be fetched and brought back by the staff, in special closed cars, I believe, so the mothers need not carry them."

Ditte's eyes beamed. "How lovely!" she exclaimed—"how convenient!" But then she noticed his expression. "Is there something wrong with that, too, now?" she asked, vexed.

"I don't want to make you sad," replied Karl—"but I doubt that is the way we must go. They should rather make it more easy for the mothers to stay at home. This method merely furthers exploitation."

"Yes, that is true," said Ditte despondently. "Do you know what is the terrible thing—that one daren't be happy at anything! There is always something else behind. You find something behind what I can see, perhaps another comes along and discovers something behind yours and gives a new explanation."

"Yes, there seems to be a long way in to the truth," Karl mused—"further, maybe, than in reality there is." He sat caressing her hand as they talked; he usually did that.

"You may kiss them now," said Ditte—"for they are nice now." He lifted both her hands up to his mouth, hiding his face in them. She smiled happily.

"Do you remember when once I complained that it was impossible to keep one's hands decent when there was so much work to do? Then you kissed them and said I musn't be ashamed of that, for they were my passport to heaven and earth. I didn't understand you then and merely felt awkward; but now I know quite well what you meant. And last night I dreamed that the Lord also kissed my hands —wasn't it strange? He stood by the garden of Paradise, where all weary men go to rest themselves, and the others wouldn't let me in. She is too young, they said—she can surely work for a while longer. But the Lord took my hands and looked at them, and then he said: She has toiled enough; my own hands did not look worse after I had created the world! And then he kissed them; and I felt very much ashamed, for nice they were not. But that was just why he did it, and all the others bowed down to me."

She lay with eyes closed, tired of speaking. Karl sat perfectly still not to disturb her. Suddenly she lifted her head: "Hark, they are singing hymns

again!" she said. She appeared to be listening upwards to heaven.

"It is along the passage—the new lodger," said Karl. "By the way, he is an old workmate of mine from the Pumping Station, a splendid fellow. But he is always singing hymns when he is alone. He is from Bornholm, and people there are all a bit touched."

Ditte's thoughts jumped from one thing to another; now she had taken up a new idea again: "Granny always said that we Mans are like the sheep—the deeper we are sheared and the more wool we give. Is that right? You are one of the Mans yourself."

"Yes, that is probably quite right. The Mans have always had a reputation for having bigger hearts than brains—they find it difficult to stick to their own. With that kind of culture one must be kept under, and so we all have been. Numerous as are the Mans you will have noticed that they all keep at the bottom. We are good soil and I am not sorry for it; the world will once bless us for it, I believe. But it isn't all the same who does the shearing. So far I'm afraid the devil has had hold of the shears! Don't you think so, too?"

But Ditte was really asleep now, calmly and deeply as she had not slept for long. Karl tiptoed out of the room. He would utilize the time while Ditte slept to look up some unemployed comrades and get to know how matters stood. He knew

there was trouble in the ranks; the increasing need made feelings more and more bitter. The men snarled at existing arrangements and at their own leaders; there was a proposal put forward for a general strike with stoppage of gas, water, and light supplies, and threats to take the reins in their own hands. He wanted reliable information; of late he had lost contact with the Opposition.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LITTLE COAL PICKER.

DITTE got up again after all; Old Rasmussen was right—as usual. She was made of too good timber to go and run away from it all. One day she sat up in bed and declared she would help the old woman make fire-lighters. And when first she had got something between her hands, her footsoles also began to itch—she must get up. She didn't feel up to much, towards evening she crept to bed again. But it was a step forward anyway; when they stuck to it they could make a krone a day. And it was work that wouldn't run dry; fire-lighters were in demand in cold weather like this.

Karl also helped when he had nothing better to do; then they sat round the work chatting, and time went beautifully—especially in the evening when the children had gone to rest. Ditte also was in bed, she felt better there; the table with the work they had placed right across the bed.

Little Peter was then all but the most important member of the family. He earned nearly as much as all the rest together. As soon as he came home from school and had had his meal he and

Ejnar went off with their two sacks and the under-carriage of an old perambulator which they used for carting the fuel. When he returned at night he had made between a half and a whole krone. That was a boy who knew how to get on, for all that he was small and quiet in his ways!

Two thrifty lads they were, he and Ejnar. They knew the town inside out with all its possibilities, knew approximately where to look for the five-and-ten-öre pieces which together made a day's earnings. It was none too easy, for often one ten-öre was waiting out at Nörrebro and the other in Kristianshavn or Valby. It was a matter of using one's legs. But still more it was a matter of using one's brain; if the "nut" was not in order it meant wearing out wooden shoes for nothing.

When—quiet as he had grown—the boy came home putting his earnings on the table without a word, the old woman clapped her hands together. "Lordy, isn't he cute," she cried—"he'll end up a millionaire. Wherever did you earn all that money; you surely didn't steal it?"

Ditte saw he was tired and didn't ask questions, but helped him off with his coat and gloves with a peculiar tenderness. She had kept something hot for him in the oven—often something special, for he was in a way their bread-winner—and helped him to bed. As soon as he was in bed he slept; occasionally he would even go to sleep over his supper. Then she looked over his clothes thoroughly, and

stitched on a pocket wherever she could. It was his boyish pride to have plenty of pockets—more than any other boy in the school; and on that point, at least, he should not feel his poverty! When she had something new for him, a muffler or a pair of gloves, she put it on top of his clothes. Then he found it in the morning and felt happy; he was rested and fresh again. And then he turned his clothes inside out to see if a new pocket had appeared in the course of the night.

Peter did not like to tell about his hunting for ways and means. What was there to speak about? That he had looked after the beasts for a driver at the Cattle Market for a whole hour while he went to a tavern—had frozen like a dog and got 25 öre for it? That he had earned ten öre on fetching beer for a skipper in Gasworks Harbor—and fifteen on bringing a parcel out to Nörrebro for the mate? That he had been right out to Valby with an express letter without getting a single copper for it—because he must have a reply and the man had gone when he arrived? There would be such flashes in the pan; Ejnar always insisted that it was deliberate cheating—he demanded payment on the spot; but Peter had been silly and unwary—was that anything to tell? There was nothing to brag about anyway!

And what there was worth telling couldn't be said, not to grown-ups, at least—they were far too stupid. So the two lads kept it to themselves. The

thing that gave a good return was coals; but there also luck and handiness were essential—it was no good running about gossiping on that score. When the two of them trotted along after dinner with the under-carriage of the old pram they looked like two innocent little boys going out to conquer the world by their childlike artlessness. And when they returned in the evening they were the same little creatures—only faded and dead-weary. But something lay between.

As soon as they had the homely street behind them the childlike air also disappeared; they turned into two alert little beings with all senses on the watch—two argus-eyed cubs of beasts of prey whom nothing escaped. They had shared the town between them. One had his base of operations at Halmtorvet where the slaughterhouses were, Gasworks Harbor with its workers and sailors, and all that; the other had Gammeltorv and Nytorv with the University and the streets where the peasants were. They changed so that they had alternate days in each place, mostly because of the rickety pram, the coal-wagon they called it. The one that worked Halmtorvet took the old skeleton and hid it behind one of the pens at the Cattle Market. It wasn't a beautiful thing to drag about, neither was there much fun in it, for there was a wheel missing on one side. But it was handy for transporting the coals. And the coals brought in a nice penny; if

everything else failed they could always fall back on coals.

They met at five o'clock as usual behind the pen where the coal-wagon stood; it had been a rotten day. Ejnar had earned 30 öre, Peter only 20. They shared the money equally between them—they always did that—and set to making up for lost time. There was only one way to do that: pick coal and sell it. There lived an old woman some way down Sönder Boulevard; she had an oil-shop and gave them fifty öre for a sack of coal—they had often sold to her. And coal was strewn everywhere, along the quays, round the Gasworks, and chiefly down by the enormous yards of the goods station. Admission was prohibited there, so they chose that way out only in case of emergency! The wharves at Lersö the boys had finished with long ago; they were too far out, and half-burned coke didn't last out well!

They hadn't much time to give away tonight, so they chose the yards of the goods station. To get there without being discovered one had to go right out to Vestre Prison; out there the place was badly lit up. The two boys set off at a gallop with the coal-wagon. Ejnar pushed it and Peter steadied on the side where the wheel was missing.

On their way they made their plan of attack. The old woman could have two sacks; that was one krone, then they could each come home with 75 öre. Mother Ditte could manage with fuel over tomor-

row, but Ejnar's mother had run out and must do her laundry. Two and a half sacks only—they could soon pick that!

Near Enghave Road they sneaked on to the site of the goods station. They had to leave the coal-wagon in the road. When they had picked as much as they could carry they dragged the sacks up to the pram and emptied the lot into one of the sacks. Then they picked into the other, took hold of each their corner, and dragged it along—then up and emptied it. Thus they went back and forth a couple of times until one of the sacks was full. There was as much in it as a grown-up man could carry, but then they were tired, too. The other sack must be emptied out on the ground every time they had as much in it as they could drag along; in the end, when the heap was big enough, they would fill it up. It was quite a stiff sum to reckon out! The old woman demanded the sack filled to the very brim, otherwise she reduced the price. They knew all that. But it took time out here where the terrain was extensive and badly lighted; and they would have a long way to go. The pram could only take one sack at a time.

"I say—let's go further in," said Ejnar. "It's thick with coals in there, and we can see better!" They wheeled along the fence; close to the yard proper they slipped down the slope with their sack.

There was a God's blessing of coals here, it was lying to no earthly purpose, trodden into the snow

and mud. But it was a great crime to pick it; if one were caught one would get a thrashing or be brought to the police station!

The yard was brilliantly lit; the big arc-lamps hung high up in the air, like birds of fire steadying themselves with their wings. Every time they beat their wings semi-darkness spread over the yard. The two boys kept in the shadow of some tall railway wagons; not far away they heard men shouting and blowing a whistle—they were shunting. They worked away like bees to get finished, they did not speak, did not even whisper. Everywhere lay rails they might trip over; Ejnar drew Peter's attention to them by pulling his sleeve. Then Peter began to shake. It was not fun, but it had to be done; and the two little boys had accustomed themselves to slipping in and out under the wheels of fate.

They heard shouts near by; a man came running: "You damned little thieves!" he shouted. Ejnar pulled Peter with him into the shadow of some trucks; but Peter lost his hold on the sack and fell, right into a beam of light. And the beam moved! He had something in his left hand, something white which he clenched his fist round not to lose. He had to push his knuckles against the ice-laid ground to get up, but one of his feet was caught in a point. And an enormous refrigerator van came gliding over him, greyish-white and fantastically big —nothing pulled it, only a man hung on to the step

behind, peering forward. The little boy screamed in terror.

When they lifted him up he saw Ejnar crawling up the slope on all fours, dragging the sack behind him.

Then everything grew dark round him—as if all the big fire-birds suddenly flew away.

CHAPTER XX.

GOD'S HEART

POVL had been up to see Mother Ditte and say good-bye. He had had a letter from Kristian who was lying in Hamburg with a ship and would remain there a couple of weeks—a real letter of four pages in which Kristian told him at great length how grand it was to be a sailor and suggested that he should come at once. He had only to come and Kristian would see to the rest. There was money for the fare in the letter, so it was genuine enough. Povl wanted to be off at once, just as he was,—there was a ship leaving on the following morning. But neither his master nor his parents must know anything about it until he was on the other side of the ocean. Nobody but Ditte must know. Did she think it was wrong to hop it in this way, he asked.

"No, you run off into the wide world if you feel like it," said Ditte. "There is no special reason for sticking here. Kristian has done well out of his running away."

So she had to promise she would go and tell the parents when he had gone. "But never mind sending my love to Sine," he said.

"You can't very well omit that," said Ditte. "She has never done you any harm."

"No—not exactly; but she is so—it's only that I don't like her! She says we are a rotten family, just because Hjalmar has cleared out."

"What, hasn't Hjalmar come back yet? And he borrowed father's money to go away!"

"No—and Else——."

"What about Else?" asked Ditte anxiously.

"Oh, she—" Povl began to cry. Well, he must be gone, he had many things to arrange. Ditte had a strange feeling; there he was running away—just like Kristian in bygone days! Perhaps she would never see any of them again. It was almost like sending a son out into the world.

Else's affair was sad enough, but it could scarcely be said to be a mortal calamity. There was no reason to take Sine too seriously, anyway, going there putting her virtue on a savings-bank book as she did when she was young.

Old Rasmussen came home with Sister Anna; they had been to birthday-coffee at Mother Geismar's. "She's going to change her religion again," said the old woman. "Seems there's nothing more to be had out of the one she's in now—whatever it's called."

"Whatever it's called, you say, mother? But it's the same you belong to yourself," said Ditte with a smile.

"Oh, is it? No, she wouldn't grow fat on that—

I've never seen manna raining down from heaven at any rate. No, I think she's speculating in the Mormons!"

Ditte laughed.

"Well, well, you laugh," said the old woman, and laughed herself. "But anyway, it's something where they have to be christened again. By the way, isn't it time little Georg was christened? People think it's strange he hasn't been christened yet — so Mother Geismar says."

"It will have to wait for a while—until we can afford it. You shall hold the bonnet, mother!"

"Aye, I don't suppose there's anyone nearer to it, all the while I've had to do with 'im since he was born. Then he would get a real name, whether it be Georg or something else."

"But mother, he's already called Georg," protested Ditte.

"Oh yes, we call him that; but it isn't his real name as long as he isn't christened—I do know that much."

"You can get it done free," the old woman continued a little later—"if you are of those who can't pay at all. For they've got to do it then, rather than letting a soul be lost. But of course, if they can get their money—"

Ditte had set out a meal. "You'd better eat now so the children can get to bed," she said. Karl was out fishing—for the first time since his illness.

"Won't you eat anything yourself?" asked the old woman.

"No, I'd rather wait until Peter comes home. He's sitting here so lonely munching his food at night—and he goes to sleep over it. I feel sorry for him."

"But you ought to go to bed, you know. Remember you're ill!" said the old woman.

No, Ditte wanted to stay up until the boy came home. She felt an unaccountable longing for him—a yearning to put her arm round him and look into his childish-serious eyes as he stood plucking at her shoulder saying his: "And do you know what, mother?" to every second sentence. There was not much laughter in him, but he was so good!

Sister Anna, on the contrary, was extremely funny, a downright little monkey. That is if she was in that mood—for she also went to the other extreme. But when she felt on top as in this moment she was irresistible. She sat pulling faces as she was eating, the most terrible faces of trolls and wild beasts, and Old Rasmussen was on the point of falling off her chair with sheer terror. Baby Brother also laughed and jumped on Ditte's lap—it was a proper concert the three of them had got up. Ditte did not take much of a part in it, she objected to noisiness. She had grown so quiet since her illness. It was quite a relief to get them to bed; the old woman also was tired and went to bed with the children.

Ditte sat down to work, her thoughts were with her little Peter. She was sorry he should be so late, he would be even more tired than usual. He must have had some unforeseen bad luck with his work, that happened occasionally; otherwise he was most punctual. It was a shame he should have to work like this always, he never had time to play. When she was quite well again there must be an end to that. Otherwise it would go with him as it did with herself, he would have no childhood—he would not even know what to do with them when at last he had a couple of hours for play. Dissatisfied or wronged by life Ditte did not consider herself; but she felt it a loss that she had not been able to play in her childhood. She felt as if that had left empty holes in both her soul and mind. And then she would have to see to getting a decent toy for him; he had been wishing for an engine—with rails. He walked about with that tooth-brush in his hand always; it would soon be as black as God-knows-what, and nobody was allowed to wash it. He had no time for real play, so it probably stuck there in his fist as a kind of compensation. And then it was the only thing of any value that had ever been given to him! The rest was old rubbish from the wharf.

When it struck ten at Rosenborg Ditte grew seriously alarmed. She would have given a lot to have Karl at home tonight; to search for the boy was hopeless, he might as well be in one end of the

town as in the other. But she needed someone to say: He'll come home all right; something has kept him late, that's all. Maybe Ejnar and he had gone to the Circus, lads like that might hit upon many things!

She told herself all this; but just because she didn't believe it she craved for somebody else to say so. Preferably Karl—he never said anything but what he could stand by!

Every moment she went to the window to look down into the yard; whenever she heard steps on the stairs she opened the door to the long passage.

There they lit the lamp in laborer Andersen's room; she went down to Selma to ask if she knew anything. Selma had been out searching, she had the shawl on yet. She looked as if she had been weeping.

"Can you understand it?" she said. "I've been trapesing round these two hours in every place I could think of; for we are sitting here freezing, and he was to come home with coals. It has never happened before, he is a wild lad, but irregular he is not. And us sitting here freezing, with not a bit to put in the stove." She cried again.

"You can have coals from me," said Ditte. "That is not the worst of it; but—."

But Selma went on complaining, she did not even hear Ditte's offer. She clung to the idea of the coals merely to avoid looking reality in the eyes.

The two women discussed going to the police sta-

tion; but neither of them liked the idea of the police interfering in their affairs; they were both unmarried mothers. And the boys would return in any case, so there was no call to surrender and explain how they were left to take care of themselves—of course they would come! They were smart, steady boys, used to going everywhere. Why shouldn't they come?

"There may be a fire somewhere," said Selma—"boys forget everything then." She had seen herself how children could hang round a place that was on fire—all night long, quite senseless.

Ditte went back to her own room and continued her vigil. She sat with her hand covering her mouth, as if she wanted to keep something down by force, staring into the lamp with eyes that comprehended nothing. Then she pulled herself violently together, she *wouldn't* give in to sad thoughts. She got up and fetched a garment from the old chest of drawers, a black knitted vest of thick wool. She had kept that from the time she was in service; she only used it when she wanted to look smart, and it was as good as new. She began to undo it, then she took out the wooden needles and started knitting. All through the winter Peter had been wishing for a knitted cap with a tassel; she had never been able to afford to buy the wool. He should have his cap now, and mittens and a muffler as well to match—then he would be happy! A vague idea dawned on her that if she fulfilled his

dearest wish then he would come—then he *must* certainly come.

At last the tension let go its hold of her, she was overwhelmed with tiredness and fell asleep—a happy sleep in which she had Peter with her. He stood by her side, leaning against her as always when they were alone together, putting his day's earnings on the table. "We nearly made nothing today," he said in his funny way—"but then we made something after all."

Ditte was awakened by Cabman Olsen going down to feed the horses; the room was cold, the lamp reeked sleepily. She had certainty now! She began tidying up the room and looking over the children's clothes; her expression was stony. She looked over Karl's stockings as well—she must not leave too much for Old Rasmussen. The worn places she strengthened with mending wool, then they would last so much longer and give the old woman a breathing space. She wondered when the definite message would come; it sat like a vicious lump in her heart, like a fist that pressed outwards. She had to open the window to get air.

There was still a light in Selma's room, so she also sat waiting. Shuffling steps sounded across the yard, a newspaper woman hobbled along with her heavy burden and pushed the paper in under Selma's door. Soon after Selma's quick steps came up the stairs; Ditte knew what that meant. Selma cried and put out the paper before her, her hand was

shaking. "There it is," she sobbed. But Ditte heard from her weeping that she did not cry for Ejnar.

Yes, there it was: Terrible Accident at the Railway Goods Yard, a child gets both legs crushed. Ditte read it automatically, she knew it beforehand —had already suffered it all. He was put on the operation table at once, poor little soul, and lay staring at the doctors and nurses with open, wondering eyes. He was conscious, for when one of the nurses began to cut his clothes away he began to cry and said: You mustn't cut my clothes to pieces, for that will make my mother so unhappy.

Ditte felt a wonderful ease in her chest when she heard her dying boy say that; it was as if the vicious fist at last pushed its way out of her heart. She stooped forward; the blood poured from her mouth.

CHAPTER XXI.

DEATH.

SLOWLY Ditte opened her eyes. She saw her thin white hands stretched out on a white sheet; round her wrists were white frills. There was a frill round the pillow, too, and on her breast—on the nightdress—another, running round her neck and down again on the other side. Once before she had awakened like this, all dressed in white—when she had given birth to Jens. But then her hair lay like coppery foam on the white linen—and a small babe lay beside her crying; now the sparse hair that was left stuck to her throat and temples. And she had the neck of a bird, she knew that without having to look, the sinews were tight when she turned her head.

Was she dead, or was she only going to die? It was in the inner room she was lying, she recognized the cracks in the ceiling; and she was lying in the good bed with the spring mattress. The quilt she also recognized by the soft pressure against her knees—it was the best quilt. But who had put that beautiful white cover on it? "Astrid Langhalm" it said in one corner, beautifully embroidered. For

a moment Ditte felt sorry she would not be nursing Fru Langhalm; she had looked forward to that. But it was merely a fleeting thought.

She lay with eyes closed, half-dozing. Someone came to the door and peeped at her; she felt it, but did not see who it was. Maybe it was Sörine—or Lars Jensen's widow? It didn't matter. But there the "Ogre" walked past the cliff! He had shot half of his head away, and was out looking for someone whose brain-case he could use—a good thing he didn't catch sight of her. Kristian came with one foot cloven; Ditte stitched it together as well as she could—he was in a hurry. We'll have to get another pair of feet so that the boy can have a change, she thought, the Innkeeper *must* give us credit. But there the Hill Farm woman suddenly appeared in the doorway, big and broad—she had the Law in her hand. Now you'll be sentenced, she said beating the Law against the door post, and every knock was one year's penal servitude. Would she never stop? Surely so many years didn't exist in all the world!

Ditte opened her eyes with difficulty; in the doorway Fru Langhalm stood knocking softly. She smiled and tiptoed up to the bed and sat down; Ditte felt her face being wiped. "The children are with us," whispered a warm breath in her ear—"you may rest calm."

The children? Ditte made an effort to catch the

meaning of it—the children? But they were everywhere.

A hand was laid on her forehead and brought her fully back to reality—Karl's! She smiled and opened her eyes. "Are you better?" he whispered bending over her. She nodded faintly but kept her mouth closed—for his sake; he believed that if she didn't speak she would soon be better. Fru Langhalm waved good-bye and speedy recovery; Karl took her place. He sat quietly holding Ditte's transparent hand, but did not speak to her; they were not allowed to speak.

She had sunk back into her state of drowsy imagination again, was following a little girl who walked alone in the forest and came to a brook. A foot-bridge spanned the brook—into Fairyland. What had become of the little girl? She had got boots that were too big for herself and too small for Granny; but did she become a princess? Ditte wanted to sing the Spinning Song, but could remember neither words nor melody.

"I must go now," whispered Karl across her face, "but Old Rasmussen is in the kitchen; she will see to you."

Very well, but Old Rasmussen didn't know the Spinning Song; she couldn't sing at all. The Bornholmer could, though! There he was singing hymns again: *Ephphatha, be opened!* Was it because he was deranged he was singing so often?

Ditte would like to know what he looked like; she had not seen him yet.

Could one see that he was deranged—and could the Lord see any difference? To Him we would probably all seem equally wise? Would life be still more difficult for a man like him, or would he perhaps get easier through it all? No, for it is responsibility that makes life so burdensome, and he was carrying a terrible responsibility for the welfare of humanity, Karl had told her. Perhaps that was his madness? Had she herself also been merely mad?

Ditte thought that she herself had achieved nothing; for all that it had been like dragging an awful load up a mountain—this providing of a little food, a few clothes, a little warmth. And every morning the load had rolled down during the night and must be dragged to the top anew! Terrible!

He continued his: Ephphatha, be opened! God knows how long he could keep it up. But if it was true what Karl said, that already three thousand years ago there had been judges and prophets thundering against the exploitation of her and little Peter and trying to rouse the masses—well, then nothing happened, then humanity was asleep! And the madman was right with his eternal *Ephphatha!* Maybe he had really got his ears opened, maybe his ideas were right! Then we had got no further

than to take the man who said the right thing and label him mad.

A man was standing in the doorway staring at her with strangely penetrating eyes that lay deep in under his forehead; their expression was like a flickering point of light at the far end of a long, dark passage. "May I come in?" he asked gently. "I know you well; Karl has spoken so often about you, and I come to congratulate you because you are going to die. I will tell you why presently!" He shut the door gently behind him and went up to sit down a little distance away from the bed. There he sat leaning forward, his arms resting on his legs, staring meditatively at the floor. And Ditte got quite excited to know what would come from his mouth, so excited that she felt a stitch through her heart and must moan.

He nodded contendedly as she moaned, several times, as if to say that that was as it should be.

"Maybe you have noticed that it is a great time we live in?" he said raising his head.

"Yes, an evil time," Ditte whispered, suddenly remembering with horror unemployment and need.

"I said a great time," he corrected her. "The evil has passed now; we two together shall make an end of it; that is why you must die. God our Father has sent evil upon us so that we may find greatness in it; but that is not given unto all men. Do you know why we all went round and round in

the desert and never got out of our misery—because our ears were not opened, our eyes were unseeing. But one day the Lord touched my eyes: *Ephphatha!* and he touched my ears: *Ephphatha!* And then I saw clearly how it all was. We have dust in our eyes and dust in our ears! Do you know who I am?" He looked at her fanatically.

Ditte nodded faintly—she was not quite sure.

"I am the Proletarian through a thousand years, and thus it was I that had my eyes opened and made the discovery. My comrades made fun of me out there at the Pumping Station because of my discovery. Karl was the best of them, but not even he could see rightly. For through meditation I have found proof that the soul is an independent being, conducting a law suit for our welfare out there in space! You get marks, one for each kindness. I got the first prize, because I have suffered and fought more than all of you, through those many terrible years; but you have got second prize, and therefore you are mine!" He looked at her significantly, pausing to give his words time to sink in.

"I belong to Karl," Ditte whispered, strange in mind. She was not frightened, but she felt cold all the same.

"You are going to die, you see," he explained—"and that is the solution of it all; you are our salvation. There is no one who can conduct the law suit

out there like you and tell the Soul how good we are and how undeservedly we suffer, and that we are dumb. A being like you is needed for that—one that can come and go and at the same time remain there for ever. Karl has told me about you, and it is for you we have been looking, God our Father and I. Enter thou into the joy of the Lord; and joy is like the Scab—it spreads to all sides among the poor." Suddenly he began to sing:

"Ephphatha! Be opened!"
At the sound the deaf ear started,
Silent lips in accents parted
As the holy anthem sped.
And throughout his senses stealing
Came an echo as of thunder,
Like to clarion voices pealing,
Like to lips that burst asunder.

"Dumb was I born into the world, and deaf and blind as well. But then I made this hymn and that opened all."

"That's not true," said Old Rasmussen from the doorway—"for that hymn I've known for many years. And now you'd better slipper round to your own place, Ancher—and don't sit here making sick people crazy with your rigmaroles." She pointed to the door.

Ancher arose from the chair. "I didn't write it "for we are all dumb. And deaf and blind we have myself," he stammered, slinking towards the door—

also been. But God has commissioned those who can to speak for us until we ourselves find the gift of speech. 'While the radiant sun is calling: Ephphatha, oh earth, awaken!'" he sang in the passage. Out there he felt brave once more.

"Pooh, crack-brained menfolk and their prating!" said Old Rasmussen, vexed. "We don't want the loonies for the salvation of the world—the clever ones'll see to that; neither of 'em have discovered how to pick up the bread where it's to be found. There they go, thinking they can make the walls of Jericho fall with their ding-dong!"

She wanted to say much more, but remembered that Ditte must have perfect quiet. "Lummy!" she whispered stealing close to the bed.

"You needn't tiptoe about and speak in a whisper, mother!" said Ditte.

"Are you much better then?" the old woman asked joyfully. Ditte did not reply.

"Don't you think it's been lovely and quiet?" she asked again. "I've had to keep a proper watch, too. That half-witted cement-worker sneaked past me, though, but apart from that I've stuck steadily by the door and said No; Fruen must rest! I've said. A crowd of people have been to express their sympathy; and that's because the papers say you've been such a kind and devoted mother. 'A broken Mother-heart' one of the papers wrote so beautifully, and so one reader came out with twenty-five kroner. You know the children are with the Lang-

halms, don't you—they *are* having a grand time! And such a lot of wreaths have come, Karl says the coffin is quite covered; he can't get anything done for running, poor soul. It's going to be a big funeral tomorrow; all the unemployed'll be in the procession. What a shame you can't come and follow Little Peter."

"I shall come, mother," said Ditte, nodding in affirmation. "If I can't follow little Peter on foot, I shall fly."

CHAPTER XXII.

Sink with lonely heart and bold
Down the depths where sorrow stoops
Over heavy thoughts untold;
Where the empty chaos droops
Like a dream fortelling woe.
Seek once more the Eternal throne!
Or to vaster spaces go
Where the future strides alone.*

THIS time Ditte had taken her drops willingly and slept most of the night. When she opened her eyes she was quite clear and knew at once that it was the day of little Peter's funeral. And she knew more than that—sufficient to free her mind from the last traces of life's burdens and wants. She felt weak but light, the body no longer called her attention to its pains and weariness, and her mind had entered into a state of balance which had nothing to do with sorrows and joys. Nothing concerned her really deeply, neither Peter's death nor Karl's anxiety for her. Her struggle *was* ended.

*The English setting of the verses in this book is the work of Mr. André M. Byrne, to whom we tender our grateful acknowledgment. Trans.

In the forenoon people arrived with wreaths and flowers. They were persons from the quarter, poor people who had only managed to raise the necessary money in the last moment. The wreaths were put into a corner of Ditte's room, she liked to look at them. Gradually they covered table and chairs; quite a heap there was—besides those already brought directly to the chapel at Vestre Cemetery. Cabman Olsen had offered to borrow a horse from his master after dinner and take the whole lot out. People that wanted to speak to Karl continually arrived, banner-bearers and others. Not merely the unemployed, but even the Trade Unions had decided to follow little Peter to the grave. It looked as if there would be a general stoppage. The little boy would have the funeral of a prince.

Ditte had made them push pillows behind her until she sat almost upright in her bed; she wanted to follow the proceedings. Karl looked in now and then but had to disappear again—he was busy. Old Rasmussen was busy too—that was good, then they forgot Ditte's condition. There was an odor of coffee from in there the whole time, every new arrival was offered refreshments.

Suddenly as she sat listening she had one of her attacks of breathlessness and a feeling of suffocation; Karl rushed up to her and gave her medicine. She lay for a couple of minutes staring at the ceiling with glassy eyes; then it passed and she dozed off. He removed the pillows carefully until she lay flat

again; then he sat down by her bed and looked in anguish at her emaciated face. Would he lose her this time? Her also? The question traced deeper and deeper furrows in his face.

Somebody came, and he went softly into the other room. It was Morten.

"I've come to warn you," he said. "It'll be a big funeral, probably the biggest the town has ever seen. Now if something should happen—if we are unable to keep them in hand?" His face was white.

"Are you going to speak?" asked Karl.

"Yes I am! Oh, if I dared to say all that is in my heart! Look, all the town is standing on its head—the Corporation, the Press, everybody; they wallow in noble drivel over the little lad—though it is they that murdered him. Oh, if we dared to let loose the cleansing torrents of the flood; then there would be one small martyr at least sacrificed not in vain."

"Yes," said Karl quietly—"I should have no objection. And I don't think one ought to try to avert God's judgment."

"No, but we are running our heads against the wall—we have not even the Trade Unions on our side. Remember that unemployment has unbalanced their minds—and then Peter's fate! It won't take much to touch off the powder. And they expect it and have taken their precautions, both the Government and the police. First they tried to

prevent this big funeral, then they gave it up, and now they have chosen to discuss the Unemployment Law—this very afternoon. I don't know whether they are nervous or wish to provoke us, but both military and police are on hand. I think they have reckoned on the masses going from the cemetery to demonstrate before the Rigsdag. Do you think we can prevent it?"

"I don't know," replied Karl gloomily. "My little wife is dying—probably she will not last the day out. Peter's accident was a severe blow to her."

"Then your place is at home, and we must try to manage without you," said Morten reaching out his hand in sympathy. "It must be a terrible blow for a mother. If only the little chap's fate could shake us up thoroughly and put a little fear into the others; then at any rate the death of one of the little beings that are crushed by the thousand by our brutal system would not have been fruitless."

"Everything will be changed now—the evil time has passed," said a voice from the door.

"Come in, Ancher," said Karl. "It is a comrade of mine—he believes he is going to save the Proletariat. He has gone to pieces under our damnable conditions," continued Karl sadly, turning to Morten.

"Yes, and so they think I am demented," said Ancher as he entered. "But I simply let them think!" His eyes shifted incessantly from one to

the other, to and fro, to and fro, regularly as a pendulum.

"Of course you are demented," said Morten looking at him with eyes full of kindness. "Isn't it dementia that some miserable little ants wish to sap the foundation of our social structure? And yet it was due to the ants that the first piece of the Chinese Wall fell. It is indeed megalomania that the smallest and meanest of all, the pauper in the strait-jacket, lunges out in his wish to embrace mankind. We *are* mad, you know—therefore the future belongs to us! Give me your hand, comrade!"

"Do you think so?" said the madman with beaming eyes, shaking his hand. "May I say something? I want to congratulate you that it was given you to see it all in that way. The others mock me and worry me. But now you'll come with me—and then we are three. Ditte will go out in space and tell the souls about us, and you will conduct my case here. That is why you have got the gift of writing."

"Never mind what the others say about you," said Morten. "What a beautiful thought that the souls are conducting our case out there. In this world it means unfortunately preaching to deaf ears and cold hearts."

"No, not now—for now Ditte goes out there and then everything will change." He looked at Morten happily, then he began to sing in his beautiful voice:

Giant earth shall hear the sighing
Of the chants of hosts supernal,
And the open graves replying
With a hymn of life eternal.

"May I speak at the grave?" he asked suddenly.

"There will hardly be time for that," said Morten—"but sing your hymn over the grave, it will do us all good to hear it! If we could get it printed!" Morten looked at his watch.

"There is time enough!" said a banner-bearer—"we have four hours yet. Shall I go to the printers and arrange it?"

"Yes, thank you," said Morten.

Ditte knocked the wall faintly; Karl went in.

"My little wife would like to say how do you do to you, Morten," he said appearing in the door. Morten went in; the madman followed at his heels.

Ditte lay on her back with her chin pushed forward; her features were much sunk, death had already commenced to form her head in its image. She made a slight sign towards the chair by her head and Morten sat down. Then she let her head drop on one side so that she could see him. Her breath came short and heavy.

"You are Morten," she whispered with difficulty. "I know you. I have never had time to read anything of yours; but you have made many men happy. They say you write so beautifully of us. And do you believe yourself in all you attribute to us?"

The question took Morten by surprise; it was some time before he replied. "In my best moments I believe it," he said.

"For one has to touch so much filth and rottenness—when one is poor. Is it possible in spite of all to keep one's soul kind and clean?"

"It may be difficult many a time, you know—and poverty *is* a curse. But for all that I would rather belong to the oppressed than to the oppressors."

"Yes, for the oppressed get marks," interposed Ancher—"One for each kindness. Ditte has many marks! Therefore she must die."

"I'm going out to find my boy," she said with an effort. "Do you think I shall meet him?" Morten nodded.

"I have neglected him so much, but now—." She had an attack; Karl asked the others to leave. He lifted her up and held her in his arms. It was the worst attack she had yet had, her face turned blue and her eyes protruded. Fortunately Dr. Torp arrived to see how she was; he gave her an injection and she calmed down. Beads of perspiration stood on Karl's forehead when it was over.

"I want to go out and make some arrangement with regard to the funeral," he said in a whisper—"but I daren't leave her to the old woman. Have you got time to stay with her for an hour or so?" Torp nodded and pulled out a book from his inner pocket.

They went out together, Karl and Morten. It

was in the middle of the day, everywhere the workers were going home; there would be an enormous gathering at the funeral. In many places flags hung from business houses and private residences.

"It is a beautiful sign of sympathy after all," said Karl moved.

"Yes, or maybe it's fear—maybe it's both. Who knows? The heart is the most powerful explosive existing. But whether it be one thing or the other, it would be better saved. It is an uncanny sort of sympathy that must find its way across the corpse of a child."

"Tell me, Morten," said Karl hesitating—"do you believe in a life after this? Or did you merely say so as a comfort?"

"I believe in a life hereafter for all who fight for something better," replied Morten. "Not for the satiated—the *Stomachs*—they have got no souls, Karl! Of course I believe, so do you—so does naturally everyone that faces the future. Faith is indispensable for life; that which must die requires merely a scheme!"

"But people generally take to faith when they are going to die."

"No, not to faith—to some plan or other. Faith is to me constancy in hope, a firm conviction of that which cannot be seen; and doesn't that word refer especially to the pauper and his bright dream of the future?"

"So then you also believe in Christ?" Karl held his breath anxiously for the reply.

"I believe in the Christ that drove the money-Jews out of the temple—not in Him who encouraged us to offer the other cheek. Does it matter whether Christ was divinely begotten or born into the world of woman, or whether He has ever existed in person or is a creation of men's imagination when they reach their highest? I believe in Christ the Rebel, the God of hearts! It is brain that rules now—brain is everything; it is our task to put the Heart on the throne again. The poor, neglected heart which is always in the way when one has to elbow one's way forward! It has been a disgrace to possess a heart, much worse than being hunch-backed; it has brought upon its owner intolerable suffering. It will be a bliss when once we conquer again. In so far we may agree with the old word: Blessed are the poor in spirit; cleverness and cunning will have to bow down to the kind heart!" Morten stopped.

"Just think how clever they are," he continued a little later. "They can tell us to a point what the stars consist of, the sun they are able to weigh exactly to the pound. But weighing out bread for hungry mouths that they cannot manage. Christ, the friend of the poor, could do that. His mind was open for all kinds of hunger; therefore the hungry gather round Him to this very day. Do you

doubt God's heart, Karl? God's heart is there where the bread is handed out to the poor."

"Then Ditte is one with God's heart," said Karl. "For she could see no needy being without helping them. Se has worn herself out for us others. Can't you mention her in your speech today?"

"I was just thinking of it—she who is going out to conduct our case! What a beautiful thought that is! We must try to get hold of the souls—a soul alight can never be extinguished!"

Ditte lay in her last agonies. Karl sat alone with her; he had let Old Rasmussen go to the funeral—she was so anxious to see all the honor they showed little Peter.

The attacks became more and more frequent; between the attacks she was delirious. Every time they came Karl lifted her up and helped her to get her breath. Did she know he was with her? Did she know at all that compassionate hands helped her, that a heart was bleeding for her sake? She seemed so horribly lonely in her agonies; nothing in her expressed a feeling of his presence, she hung in his arms staring at him—without seeing him. It was difficult, almost insuperably difficult, to see a being, one's most beloved, fight the last fight and not be able to ease the struggle, not even possess the means of telling her that he was with her.

She was calmer again and lay breathing heavily

—she was delirious. "Yes, yes, yes," she said—"there, there." Something or other was haunting and plaguing her. "Yes, yes, I'm coming!" she murmured in an impatient tone.

Karl put his hand on her forehead. "There, dear," he said soothingly. "You have nothing to do, nothing at all! We'll see to it all." Ditte opened her eyes and looked upon him with recognition.

"Why are you crying?" she asked, strangely unsympathetic.

Karl shook his head: "It is all so meaningless!" he said.

"What is meaningless?"

"Oh—everything!" He lowered his head against her quilt.

"But you really can't expect me to hang round you the whole time; the others must also— —" Then once more it came: "There, there—yes, I'm coming!"

"My dear child," said Karl anxiously putting both hands round her head which lay tossing from side to side. "Do try to be calm, darling, darling Ditte."

"Calm, calm!" she said. "Yes. But there's always someone calling. I shall soon be tired of it."

Again an attack was coming on—a terrible one; to Karl it seemed to last for hours. They grew worse and worse, the attacks.

Somewhere along the lofts a small child was crying; its weeping was borne along plainly through the quietude which made it still more terrible to listen to. Every time the weeping increased Ditte's body twitched.

Karl went quietly out to shut the door to the lofts.

"It's a child that has dirtied itself," Ditte said suddenly in a high, glass-clear voice. "It's mother evidently isn't there. But *I* am not going to help it! I shan't get up to help it."

No, no—she certainly couldn't do that! Karl shook his head and laughed, his features twisting. "Ditte," he said trembling—"do you remember a little girl who was frightened of the dark, and despite that got up in the night to give pussy milk. And do you remember——." His voice broke; he put his head down on her quilt and sobbed loudly.

Something was working in Ditte's dying features, an awakening memory flared up across them in an expression of pain. She had taken hold of his hair —he *mustn't* cry; with a faint movement she tried to push the quilt aside and hold him closely to hide his head at her breast. She wanted to say a motherly word to him. But it turned into a rattle. A shock ran through her, as if her tortured heart leaped up in pain—and burst. Karl gave a terrified start. Then he understood. Grey and tearless he put her hands across her breast and folded them.

Song sounded in the distance—the Socialist March. And a strange noise as of heavy rain lashed the pavement; it increased to a roar, an endless stamping, a thunder of footsteps. It was the thousands of the funeral procession who made their way along Ditte's street on their march towards the Rigsdag—to comfort the little Coalpicker's mother. There they were taking up a new song, Karl perceived his deranged comrade's voice above all others:

"Ephphatha! Be opened!"
At the sound the deaf ear started,
Silent lips in accents parted
As the holy anthem sped.
And throughout his senses stealing
Came an echo as of thunder,
Like to clarion voices pealing,
Like to lips that burst asunder.

"Ephphatha! Be opened!"
Still the voice of God impelling
Sets the seed of faith aswelling
In the heart where hope was dead.
And my captive ears have broken
Through the prison-gates of sadness;
And my trembling lips have spoken
Songs of praise and songs of gladness.

"Ephphatha! Be opened!"
Whisper of the world's beginning
Echoed in the zephyr's singing
Telling of a winter fled;
In the sound of soft rain falling
On the boughs from slumber shaken;
While the radiant sun is calling
"Ephphatha! Oh earth, awaken!"

"Ephphatha! Be opened!"
Word of light and word of wonder!
When the last trump sweeps in thunder
Through the gardens of the dead,
Giant earth shall hear the sighing
Of the chants of hosts supernal,
And the open graves replying
With a hymn of life eternal.

For a long time the steps down there continued their thunder; and longer still Karl sat with his hands clasped between his knees, staring into the dark and the stillness.

Then he arose—Old Rasmussen was on the stairs, filled right up to the throat with the great happening.

A HUMAN BEING IS DEAD.

THERE are one and a half milliard stars in the heavens, and—as far as we know—one and a half milliard human beings on earth. An equal number of each! One might almost believe the ancients were right when they said that every human being is born under his own particular star. Round about in expensive observatories—placed all over the world, now on plains, now on high mountains—highly gifted scientists are sitting, armored with the finest of instruments, searching the heavens night after night. They peer and take photographic plates, all their lives are filled with this one aim: to make themselves immortal by the discovery of a new star or by the substantiation of the disappearance of a star. One orb more or less —out of the milliard and a half that are spinning round out there.

Every second a human being dies. A point of light is extinguished, never again to be relit, a star which, maybe, has shone with uncommon beauty—which at any rate has had its own peculiar spectrum, never observed before. A being which has strewn around it perhaps genius, perhaps kindness, leaves the world; perceived only once—the wonder

that became flesh and blood—it ceases to exist. No man is a replica of another, nor will he ever be repeated. Every human being is like the comets that only once in all eternity touch the orbit of our earth and for a brief period trace their brilliant course across it—a phosphorescing between two eternities of darkness.

Then there will be sorrow among men for every soul that leaves the earth? Do they stand around his coffin with solemn faces saying: Behold what the world has lost and will never recover! Behold the strange wonder which this time kissed earth!

Alas, Ditte was no extinguished star whose empty place in the universe must be recorded in time and eternity. As a parasite she arrived—at least she was received as such; only barely did she enforce her claim to existence. As one of the big grey crowd of one milliard and a half she took up her task and did her duty. The world was richer because of her, although it could not be ascribed to her as a fact. She was merely one of the nameless multitude—the child of man whose mark of distinction is rough hands.

She was buried in the paupers' corner of the cemetery—there where the graves must be demolished as quickly as possible to make room for new ones; she was buried at the expense of the parish. That was the only honor conferred on her in all her life—and that was not done voluntarily.

Did she succeed in softening hearts?

(Continued from front flap)

But keep the profit of their work they could not; they allowed others to have the spending of it, and thus it came about, that in spite of their industry they remained as poor as ever."

Yet Ditte is never poor in spirit, even from her early days as an unwanted, illegitimate child. Her aging grandparents who take her to live with them see life afresh through her widening eyes and her fingers reaching out to explore the world about her. Later, Ditte is adopted by kindly, naive Lars Peter, the rag and bone man, looked down upon by well-to-do and poor alike as the least successful citizen in their midst. Going to live in Lars Peter's leaking, dilapidated "Crow's Nest," Ditte makes of it a shining home and becomes "Little Mother" to all the younger children in the family.

Nexö's writing is magnificent throughout; the giant simplicity of an enduring folk tale, never the simple-mindedness of a Hemingway kind of monosyllabic grunting. And without any overt "psychologizing," he probes deep into his characters. Ditte, growing up to young womanhood, is revealed in her complexities, her doubts and her rainbow joys. She participates in all experiences, hers is no shallow stream of consciousness, but a plunging into the moving current of life.

Nor is Ditte the single fully-drawn character. Lars Peter, too, is shown in his manysidedness; so is Sörine, Ditte's unhappy and desperate mother; and Johannes, Lars Peter's opportunist brother, who has learned the lesson well that in a society ruled by money, a crooked line is frequently the straightest path to a bank account.

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